



FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME

2020 REPORT TO THE TWELVE DISTRICTS

—
WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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President's message

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38,39).

As I write this report, the nation and the world are in the grip of an unprecedented public health and economic crisis. Many governors have issued “safer at home” orders for all who are not involved in critical and essential businesses and activities. Life in America and abroad has been disrupted as never before. There are signs that the country—at least in some places—is beginning to reopen, but no one really knows when things will get back to some degree of normal.

At the beginning of this crisis, the synod took necessary steps to respond. All travel by synod workers—both international and domestic—was suspended. Meetings scheduled to be held at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry were canceled or postponed. All workers at the synod headquarters were directed to work from home if possible. Decisions were made to cancel large gatherings planned for the summer, including the International Youth Rally and the district conventions.

Congregations around the synod have also been impacted. In some places, governmental restrictions have resulted in the need to restrict the size of gatherings for worship and other congregational events. In other places, tighter restrictions have made it necessary for worship services to be suspended altogether. It has been heartening to see congregations around the synod finding ways to continue to bring God's Word and worship experiences to people via technology. His Word continues to be preached and proclaimed, accomplishing his saving purpose and strengthening the faith of his people.

In the middle of all of this, it may be difficult to focus on the continuing opportunities and challenges that lie before our synod. But that, along with placing ourselves completely into God's gracious care, is what we must do.

When it comes to God-given opportunities, doors have been opened for gospel proclamation—some of them in places that we could never have believed possible only a few years ago. In the report from World Missions, you will read about some of those amazing opportunities and how God is blessing our work. In Home Missions, district mission boards continue to identify dozens of places where new home mission congregations could be planted. The only obstacles are funding and manpower—both of which we are confident that God will provide according to his gracious wisdom. Our ministerial education schools have been blessed with stability in both finances and enrollment; we pray that the current situation does not impact the schools and their students for long. The various commissions of Congregational Services have ramped up their efforts to provide counsel and resources to congregations as they wrestle with challenges brought about by demographic and cultural changes.

On the other hand, old challenges remain, and new ones have appeared. Satan continues his relentless efforts to attack God's people and his church. The culture that surrounds us is relentlessly working to undermine God's truth and to lure God's people onto a path that leads away from his Word and from the Savior it proclaims. Financial conditions have limited the ability of congregations and the synod to expand the work that we are doing. And then there is the coronavirus crisis, bringing its own disruption and difficulties.

Yet, whether it comes to opportunities or challenges, we know that the Lord of the Church is still in control. His truth, his promises, and his grace continue to be our sure foundation—one that can never be shaken by a virus or by anything else. We know, as Paul wrote, that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All areas of the synod's mission and ministry are reporting to the districts the work that has been done in the past year, as well as plans, God-willing, for the future. Since districts are not meeting this summer, this reporting will be done only through the *Report to the Twelve Districts*. As you look at these reports, join me in thanking God for what he has permitted us to do in his kingdom work, as well as a fervent request that he would continue to enable us to reach more and more people with the saving message of Christ. If you have any questions about anything in the reports, feel free to contact the individual or board responsible for the ministry being done.

As at all times, we commend ourselves and our lives to God's gracious and all-knowing care.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Organizational chart

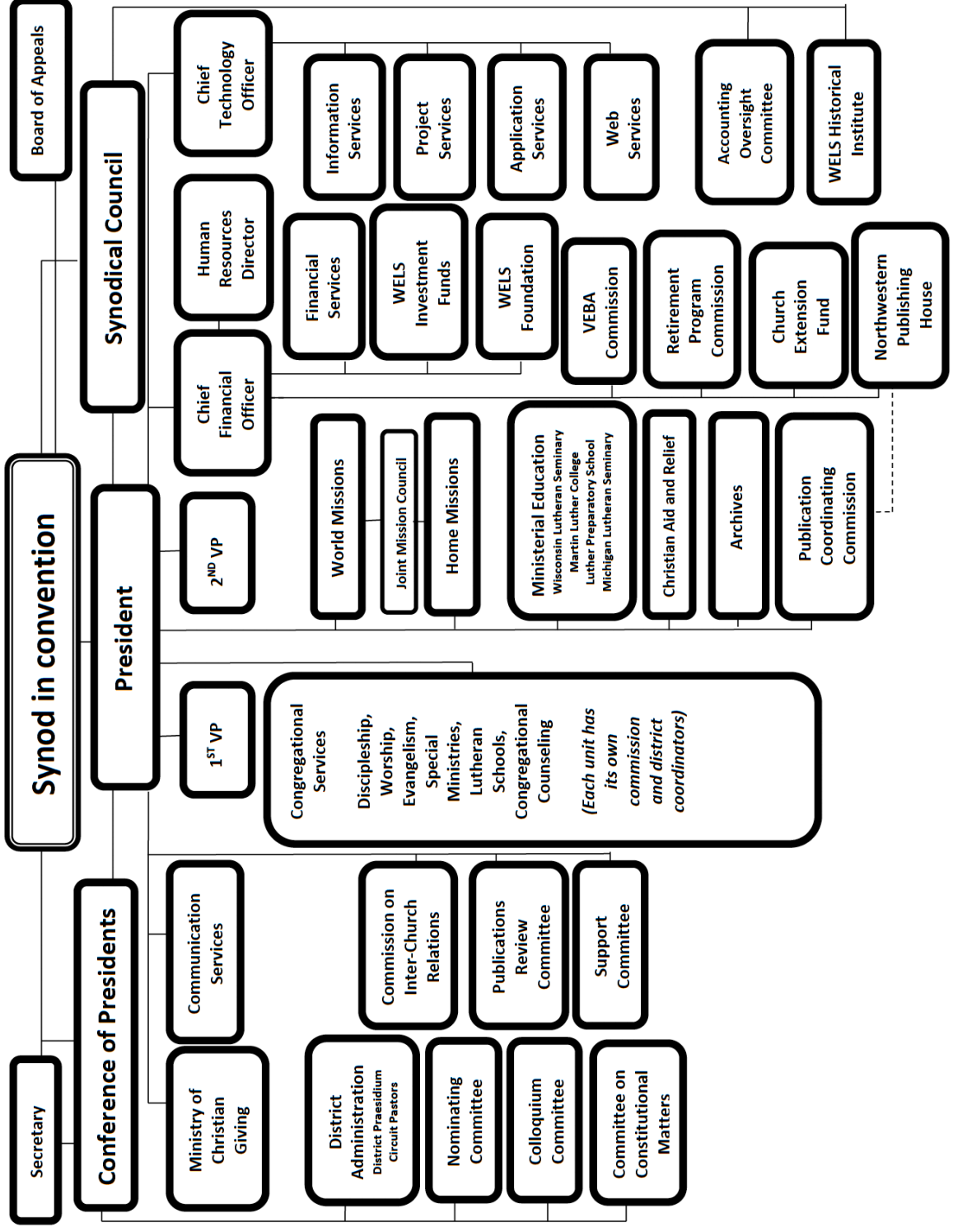


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Congregation and District Ministry

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

Support Committee

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

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 and to assist all areas of ministry, subsidiaries, and one affiliate with their communications
- Coordination of public responses and communications of the synod

Synod Nominating Committee

Selection of nominees for convention elections

Congregational Services

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

Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee

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

Translation Liaison Committee

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

Synod convention

District ministries and functions

- Costs related to the functions of the districts, district praesidia, and circuit pastors
- District conventions and other meetings
- District committees

Conference of Presidents

The Conference of Presidents (COP) is composed of the 12 district presidents, elected by their respective districts, the synod president, and the two synod vice presidents. The synod president serves as the chairman of the COP. The synod secretary, 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 monthly between meetings via video conference. The Conference of Presidents also meets twice in May in its role as the Assignment Committee of the synod. It should be noted that the April 2020 face-to-face meeting was canceled due to the coronavirus situation. A video conference was held instead in April to handle vital issues. The two May meetings to handle assignments of ministry candidates were handled via video conference in 2020.

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

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

Doctrinal statements

The Conference of Presidents is responsible for overseeing the doctrine and practice of the synod, both as a group and through the role carried out by individual district presidents.

In that role, the Conference of Presidents concluded that a re-statement of the synod's doctrinal position on the role of man and woman would be beneficial. This is not because the synod's doctrinal position on the subject has changed in any way, but because it was apparent that the current doctrinal position, adopted decades ago, did not address issues that have arisen since its adoption. Another reason for the re-statement is that there are portions of the current statement that are misunderstood or misconstrued; a re-statement would give the opportunity to clarify and provide additional explanation where needed.

The Conference of Presidents appointed a special committee to draft the re-statement. The document entitled "Male and Female in God's World," along with an accompanying Bible study, was completed in 2019 and made available to the members of the synod for discussion and review. The intent is for called workers as well as lay members of the synod to study and discuss the statement, provide input, and request clarification if needed. The re-statement will be on the agenda of the 2020 pastor conferences. A digital copy of the re-statement can be accessed at wels.net/rtd2020.

Once district conventions have provided their input, the COP will determine how to proceed. It could be presented to a future synod convention as a replacement for the current doctrinal statement, or it could be adopted as a supplemental update existing alongside the current statement.

The Conference of Presidents also commissioned a pastoral “white paper” entitled “A Pastoral Statement on the Transgender Movement.” As its title indicates, this document is intended to be a help and resource for pastors, congregations, and schools as they encounter this issue in their ministries. It was published in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. An accompanying document entitled “Human Sexuality, Personhood, Identity, and the Historic Christian Faith” seeks to provide a solid biblical and confessional foundation for our synod’s doctrine and practice in this area.

Proposed change to the synod’s retirement plan

The Synodical Council shared with the Conference of Presidents the proposal for changing the synod’s retirement plan from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan. The Conference of Presidents reviewed the proposal in detail and focused its attention on how the proposal would affect called workers in retirement. After thorough discussion, the Conference of Presidents endorsed the plan. The Synodical Council had planned to seek input from the district conventions in the summer of 2020, but that became impossible once the district conventions were canceled due to the COVID-19 virus. The Synodical Council will discuss how to move forward with this proposal at its meeting in November 2020.

Revisions of bylaws governing discipline

The Conference of Presidents continues to work on possible revisions of the synod and district bylaws dealing with discipline. The complicated work on the revisions is still in progress.

Doctrinal issues discussed

Representatives of WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) have always held regular meetings to discuss matters of doctrine and practice. The purpose of these meetings is to strengthen and affirm the doctrinal unity that serves as the basis for our fellowship and to discuss and clarify any questions or issues that arise.

Previously, these discussions involved the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and the Doctrine Committee of the ELS. WELS decided it would be more appropriately represented by the Doctrine Committee of the Conference of Presidents. The first meeting was held in September 2019. This change has proved to be mutually beneficial.

Ministry of Christian Giving review

The Conference of Presidents engaged a professional firm to conduct a thorough review of the Ministry of Christian Giving. The review, which began in March, was prompted by a desire to position the Ministry of Christian Giving to best carry out its important work. Recommendations to changes in staffing, procedures, and policies will be considered by the Conference of Presidents when they are received. Approved changes will be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

Martin Luther College funding efforts

The Conference of Presidents authorized a two-year synodwide capital campaign to provide campus improvements and additional financial aid. The “Equipping Christian Witnesses” effort is currently underway.

Hmong Vietnam opportunity

For several years WELS has been conducting theological training for leaders of the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam. This church body has requested thorough theological training for its pastors and lay leaders, with the goal of the church becoming a confessional Lutheran church body.

The government of Vietnam is fully supportive of these efforts and invited WELS to build a training center on land that it made available. Planning for construction is taking place as this report is being written.

To provide support for this work, the Conference of Presidents authorized a special offering to raise the money needed for this project. The offering exceeded \$2 million. The COP thanks the members and congregations of the synod for this generous support.

New counselor for the Commission on Congregational Counseling

In order to provide much-needed assistance to congregations facing challenges due to demographic and other changes, the Conference of Presidents approved the creation of the new full-time position of congregational counselor.

Institute for Lutheran Apologetics

Apologetics is the religious discipline of defending the Christian faith against attack and falsehood. In today's post-Christian world, Christians will be faced with many opportunities to defend their beliefs against those who attack and challenge the truths of Scripture. Christian apologetics can also be a means to help unbelievers or skeptics to see that their beliefs are not tenable.

Given the growing importance of apologetics for Christians today, the Conference of Presidents was presented with a proposal to establish an institute for Lutheran apologetics. The Conference of Presidents approved the establishment of the institute.

The following is a summary of the purpose and function of the proposed institute:

The Institute for Lutheran Apologetics

Objective

The Institute for Lutheran Apologetics (ILA) is a group of Confessional Lutherans who have brought together their training and experience in utilizing apologetics for both evangelism and discipleship purposes. Members of the ILA hope to assist and encourage pastors and lay members to use apologetics in their lives and ministries in appropriate ways.

Functions

The Institute for Lutheran Apologetics intends to carry out four functions:

Studying—The ILA is committed to an on-going study of apologetics, viewing this theological discipline from a distinctly Lutheran perspective. This study will include examinations of practices and tactics in utilizing apologetics for evangelism and discipleship. The ILA intends to share its study with interested persons through a variety of means.

Meeting—The ILA intends to assemble periodically and to invite other individuals to participate in the studying process.

Resource Production—The ILA intends to coordinate the production of resources to aid congregations and individuals in utilizing apologetics for evangelism and discipleship.

Presentation/Consulting—When invited, members of the ILA will work with pastors/congregations to offer advice and counsel about the utilization of apologetics.

Oversight

The Institute of Lutheran Apologetics is to be considered an arm of the Conference of Presidents. It receives its funding with the advice and consent of that body. The funding and production of resources is coordinated by WELS Congregational Services, the area of ministry that serves under the Conference of Presidents.

Membership

The Institute for Lutheran Apologetics will consist of between 20 and 30 members. At least six will be pastors serving WELS congregations. At least four will be individuals who serve in Christian education. At least three will be individuals who work/have worked in a scientific field. The ILA will also include seven de facto members: the coordinator of WELS Congregational Services; the director of the Commission on Evangelism; the director for the Commission on Discipleship; the director for the Commission on Lutheran Schools; two representatives from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, one teaching in the area of evangelism and the other in the area of dogmatics; a representative of the Conference of Presidents.

Leadership

The Institute for Lutheran Apologetics has a moderator and an assistant moderator selected every two years by members of the ILA. The moderator and assistant moderator serve as a coordinating committee. Other members of the ILA assist with administrative tasks as necessary.

Workload of the presidents of large districts

The Conference of Presidents is concerned that the workload of the presidents of the largest districts has increased significantly in recent years. Called worker and congregational issues, as well as the pastor and teacher vacancy levels, prove to be very time consuming and have presented growing burdens on the presidents of the large districts. The Conference of Presidents continues to consider options that will help to relieve some of this burden in a way that

enables district presidents to remain connected to congregational ministry. There may not be a single, “one size fits all” solution to this problem; it could be that solutions may vary from district to district.

Affiliated ministries committee

The synod has been blessed with dozens of WELS-affiliated organizations that carry out specific types of ministry. (These organizations are listed in the synod’s Yearbook under the heading “Affiliated Ministries.”) Maintaining good communication with these organizations is vital to the work of the synod and to the work carried out by these organizations. To ensure that good communication is maintained and to strengthen the synod’s relationship with WELS-affiliated ministries, the Conference of Presidents has a committee of three district presidents to meet and communicate regularly with these groups. The committee has the following goals:

- Building trusting relationships with affiliated ministries through mutual listening and through the sharing of plans.
- Helping the COP to grow in its understanding of how affiliated ministries utilize the calling process for called workers.
- Working to avoid potential misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Relaying any positive input or concerns that the Conference of Presidents might have as they relate to the organizations’ ministries.

In addition to the work done by this committee, the Conference of Presidents also regularly invites affiliated ministries to meet with the Conference of Presidents to facilitate a good understanding of the work that they are doing.

Voluntary Employee Benefits Association

There are many benefits that result when congregations participate in the Voluntary Employee Benefits Association (VEBA) plan. Since the WELS VEBA plan covers all workers at the same cost, the cost of insurance does not become an issue that interferes with the call process. Even though the WELS VEBA plan may be more expensive for younger workers, it is also less expensive for older workers. While it is not mandatory that congregations offer health insurance coverage through WELS VEBA, the Conference of Presidents recognizes the many benefits of doing so. The coverage offered by WELS VEBA is excellent, and having workers covered by WELS VEBA ensures that health insurance coverage does not become an impediment to workers as they consider calls. The Conference of Presidents continues to encourage congregations to participate in the plan for all called workers.

The Conference of Presidents is aware that some congregations are only offering single health insurance coverage for their called workers, even if their spouse does not have health insurance coverage through their work. The Conference of Presidents notes that our synod compensation guidelines state that a congregation is to “provide adequate health insurance for the family.” In light of that guideline, the Conference of Presidents strongly discourages congregations from passing on any health insurance costs to families in that situation.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, reporter

Rev. Mark Schroeder, president and chairman
Rev. James Huebner, first vice president
Rev. Joel Voss, second vice president
Rev. Jon Buchholz, Arizona-California District
Rev. Douglas Free, Dakota-Montana District
Rev. Philip Hirsch, Nebraska District
Rev. Michael Jensen, Western Wisconsin District
Rev. Dennis Klatt, Minnesota District
Rev. David Kolander, Southeastern Wisconsin District
Rev. Donald Patterson, South Central District
Rev. Snowden Sims, Michigan District
Rev. John Steinbrenner, Pacific Northwest District
Rev. Donald Tollefson, North Atlantic District
Rev. Charles Westra, South Atlantic District
Rev. Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin District

Advisory:

Rev. Robert Pasbrig, secretary

WELS Support Committee

Our calling

“Gray hair is a beautiful crown. It is found on the way to righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31, EHV). Many times in the Scriptures, our heavenly Father reminds us that our Christian faith is to be marked by respect for our elders. In our Wisconsin Synod, one way we strive to show such respect and loving care is through the WELS Support Committee. This committee has the privilege of providing financial assistance to retired called workers and/or surviving spouses who don’t have adequate financial resources for everyday living expenses. The following principles 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 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 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 \$245,000. In 2019, there were 20 individuals or couples throughout the synod receiving support. This resulted in a monthly expenditure of \$16,775 and an annual expenditure of \$201,300. 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 sought assistance in 2019.

A look ahead

The Support Committee continues to provide assistance to retired called workers and/or their surviving spouses as long as synod finances make it possible. In the first months of 2020, 18 individuals and/or couples were receiving support, calling for a monthly expenditure of \$17,925 and an annual budget for approved requests of \$215,100. 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. Glenn Schwanke, reporter

Rev. Glenn Schwanke, chairman

Rev. Brett Brauer

Rev. Timothy Ehlers

Rev. Joel Leyrer

Rev. Joel Nitz

Translation Liaison Committee

Our calling

The Translation Liaison Committee was established in 2013 “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 Translation Liaison Committee consists of seven professors and parish pastors who were appointed by the Conference of Presidents.

Our current situation

Christian Standard Bible

As reported in the 2019 *Book of Reports and Memorials*, the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) is publishing a 2020 revision of its Bible text. This revision is a modest adjustment to improve some weaknesses that were observed after the first publication of the CSB in 2017.

In view of this CSB revision, the Translation Liaison Committee submitted a number of translation suggestions in May 2019, including 6 more substantial matters and 28 editorial issues. We are happy to report that all of our suggestions were considered, and most of them were adopted. With those that were not adopted, the CSB Oversight Committee was kind enough to reply personally to tell us their reasons for maintaining the status quo.

This treatment fits with the way that the CSB overseers have treated the Translation Liaison Committee since the beginning of our contacts with them in 2013. When the CSB was coming into being as a revision of the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the Translation Liaison Committee provided a large amount of input, which was received eagerly and graciously.

It is not surprising that the CSB has prepared a modest revision so soon after its original publication. The process is similar to the New International Version (NIV), which had a minor revision in 1984, a few years after it was first published in 1977. But now, CSB overseers do not anticipate any more changes for a good number of years, recognizing the value of a stable text. At this point, the CSB Oversight Committee has no plans for future meetings.

Information about the CSB revision can be found at [csbible.com/2020-revision-of-the-csb-text/](https://www.csbible.com/2020-revision-of-the-csb-text/), including a list of the more significant changes in the 2020 revision. The translation suggestions submitted by the Translation Liaison Committee can be found at [bibletranslation.welsrc.net](https://www.bibletranslation.welsrc.net). Also available there is the report of the WELS committee that reviewed the CSB. This report was published in the 2017 *Report to the Twelve Districts*, and it gave a favorable review to the CSB as a translation that could be recommended for use in WELS.

New International Version

The Translation Liaison Committee continues to write up translation suggestions for the NIV, and so far we have submitted a total of 76 in the past four years. When we submit recommendations, they are always gratefully received, and we are promised that all of our recommendations will receive consideration by the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), which oversees the NIV text. The 15-member CBT meets every summer, according to the original charter of the NIV.

At this point, we understand that the CBT does not have any immediate plans for the publication of a revised NIV. We have noticed that there are a number of new members on the CBT. Appointed in 2019 were Dr. Sandra Richter and Dr. Daniel Wallace. New in 2017 was Dr. Mark Boda and in 2016 was Dr. Andrew Shead. Still serving as chairman of this self-perpetuating committee is Dr. Douglas Moo.

All of the Translation Liaison Committee recommendations submitted to the NIV are posted on the WELS website under “Translation.” As a committee, we feel that we have now given attention to the main passages that have received special criticism in WELS over the years, but there still are other passages where little improvements could be suggested.

A look ahead

WELS obviously is settling into a period where a variety of Bible translations are in use among us, and we should

remember that it is a distinct blessing to have a number of high-quality translations to choose from. The Translation Liaison Committee is honored to maintain contact on behalf of WELS with the major Bible translations prepared outside of our fellowship.

Since the NIV is in wide use in WELS and since the NIV has an orderly, ongoing process for handling suggestions for improvement, we on the Translation Liaison Committee intend to continue writing up NIV translation recommendations. If anyone in WELS has a translation suggestion for the NIV, we would be happy to consider it. Please share it with any member of the committee. We would also be happy to receive other advice for the direction and work of our committee.

Prof. Thomas Nass, reporter

Prof. Thomas Nass, chairman

Rev. Brett Brauer

Prof. Kenneth Cherney, Jr.

Prof. Joel Fredrich

Rev. Geoffrey Kieta

Rev. Glenn Schwanke

Rev. Paul Zell

Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee

Our calling

The Continuing Education for Called Workers (CECW) Committee coordinates our synod's efforts to assist called workers to grow in faith, knowledge, and skill in order to carry out the unique vocations (callings) God has given to each. Helping them grow includes not only assisting them toward professional growth in their public ministry callings but also encouraging them toward growth in their most important calling (the calling to faith in Jesus), as well as all their other callings God may have given to each (spouse, parent, member of a congregation and synod, etc.).

The CECW also works to help synodical leaders and calling bodies have a clear understanding of why it is wise for calling bodies, and our whole synod, to invest in the growth of all their called workers. Growth for our called workers is certainly *not* about self-centered goals (advancing their career, gaining recognition, increasing compensation). Growth for our called workers is about growing in the gospel for themselves and growing into being a clearer glimpse of God's mercy wherever God has called them to represent him (home, church/school, in the community). As our synodical theme reminds us, we are helping them let *Christ's love* be ever more clearly seen. That is what *their calling* is all about. To that end the CECW also seeks to urge lay leaders to understand that it is equally important as a synod to invest in assisting current called workers toward growth as it is to invest in preparing future called workers to enter ministry.

The CECW includes representatives from Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and 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. Our report is divided into the CECW's work for teachers/staff ministers and for pastors.

Teachers and staff ministers

Our current situation

New teacher support

All beginning teachers in WELS schools are assigned an instructional mentor for their first two years of teaching. Eighty-five percent of administrators say that their beginning teachers' mentoring has positively built and extended their teachers' practices in ministry.

New Teacher Institute (NTI) participation

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Beginning teachers	132	159	162	168	174
Mentors	101	123	114	115	115
Schools		125	120	122	123

Veteran teacher support

The number of teachers and staff ministers that utilize continuing education through Martin Luther College continues to grow each year. During the 2018–19 academic year, 1,109 people participated in MLC continuing education. Only about 130 of those were graduate students seeking a master’s degree. The vast majority are teachers and staff ministers who participate in stand-alone courses, webinars, or other formats. About 700 people participated during the school year (spring/fall), and around 65 percent used online options.

Ministerial Growth and Evaluation Program

The Commission on Lutheran Schools has re-imagined WELS teacher growth around the idea of teacher coaching with periodic assessment. The result is the Ministerial Growth and Evaluation Program. The program’s components include regular teacher observation and coaching by school personnel, personal improvement planning through Ministry Development Plans (adopted by 2011 synod convention), and periodic evaluations using a descriptive rubric. The Ministry Development Plans focus on teacher growth for improved student learning. Evaluations are shared with the Commission on Lutheran Schools, with general information shared as part of the calling system.

The Commission on Lutheran Schools is training school leaders and teachers how to implement the new program. Four training modules have been developed to train educators at all levels to implement and integrate the new protocols. All training modules will have been shared in all districts by mid-summer of 2020.

Martin Luther College is supporting the Ministerial Growth and Evaluation Program training with two micro-credential series: Learning-Focused Instruction (for teachers) & Learning-Focused Supervision (for principals and early childhood directors). Participants work independently on the skill using MLC-provided resources and receive a digital badge when they demonstrate skill competence.

School leader support

WELS Principal & Early Childhood Director Standards and Continuum

The Commission on Lutheran Schools rolled out a continuum for both the WELS principal standards and early childhood director standards. The continuum is designed as a reflective tool to encourage thoughtful Ministry Development Plans.

WELS Principal Credential

In response to a Conference of Presidents (COP) request, the Commission on Lutheran Schools and Martin Luther College have created a process to enable all principals, regardless of experience or types of training, to demonstrate they have the characteristics, knowledge, and skills required to serve as a Lutheran school principal. The credential standardizes training and experiences across all principal pathways and lets the COP and calling bodies know who is fully qualified to serve as principal. Calling bodies are encouraged to provide credentialed principals with the synod-adopted compensation and administration time. Every principal is encouraged to obtain the WELS Principal Credential.

Pathways to School Leadership

21st-Century Lutheran Principal Initiative: Adopted by the 2017 synod convention, this program fully trains cohorts of non-principal veteran teachers to be principals. Participants receive a 50 percent scholarship toward their administrative master’s degree. The first cohort completed their training and are beginning their principal ministries this fall. The fourth cohort is just getting underway.

Principal Training Program: Helps pair newly assigned graduates with a veteran principal to provide on-the-job training and mentoring in both teaching and the principalship so that after three years the young teacher is better prepared to accept a call into a position of greater school leadership. Plans are in place to mirror the principal training already in place through the Director Training Program, which will pair a newly assigned early childhood teacher with a host early childhood director.

Apprentice Mentoring: Continues to be offered to any individuals whose initial assignment is as an early childhood director apprentice or principal apprentice. The apprentice is mentored in both teaching and leadership for two years before being considered director or principal. Such assignments have been made less frequently as the desire is to provide congregations with candidates who’ve had leadership training and coursework prior to beginning in such a role.

A look ahead

The Ministerial Growth and Evaluation Process focuses mainly on formative teacher growth for improved student learning. New summative teacher, principal, and director evaluations will begin in 2021. We are confident the new rubrics and descriptors will be a blessing to our educators and the students they serve and also help provide more clarity in the calling process.

Pastors

Our current situation

Many things reported elsewhere in this *Report to the Twelve Districts*, especially under Congregational Services, provide rich opportunities for pastors to be growing in faith and in their unique vocations. However, a considerable part of the work of encouraging the ongoing growth of pastors in our synod has been entrusted to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS). The seminary carries out this work through Grow in Grace (the seminary's institute for pastoral growth). Grow in Grace seeks to partner with pastors for growth in all their callings under four main goals. Here is the current situation in pastoral growth under each goal.

Events and courses

Grow in Grace seeks to deliver Christ-centered, accessible, and ministry impacting events and courses in the four theological disciplines.

The Master of Sacred Theology (STM) program offers courses to pastors in nine areas of focused study designed to meet a pastor's unique gifts and the unique needs of his calling body.

To make courses more available, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has shifted the pattern of how in-person formal course offerings are offered to pastors. In even-numbered years, Summer Quarter will be held on campus. On-campus instruction provides the blessing of being part of a learning community away from regular ministry duties. Being on campus also allows pastors to enjoy all the learning, worship, and fellowship resources our WLS campus provides.

Then, in odd-numbered years, we have moved to offering district-wide satellite courses in as many districts as possible. While such satellite opportunities offer courses in a more condensed agenda than on-campus instruction, the fact that they are offered geographically within the district, and that they are offered at an already regularly scheduled district gathering, combine to provide a much easier path toward attendance for pastors. The strongest evidence of the blessing this can be was that in 2019 more than 600 pastors participated in a course at the eight district-wide satellites. That attendance was more than five times the highest recorded attendance of any on-campus Summer Quarter.

In addition to courses offered in that odd-/even-year pattern at Summer Quarter or district-wide satellites, each year online courses continue to be offered as well as on-campus courses during Winterim (January).

Retreats and mentoring

Mentoring: Pastor Partners mentoring, formally adopted by the synod in 2015, provides new seminary graduates with three years of focused encouragement from a trained pastoral mentor. While mentoring remains optional for each seminary graduate, in the past two years (2018, 2019) 100 percent of graduates requested a mentor. Of the more than 125 pastors who have now been mentored, we have seen the resignation of only one pastor who was active in mentoring. God is blessing us with retaining a higher percentage of new pastors than we have seen since the 1980s.

Retreats: Each spring, Celebration of Ministry Retreats give pastors and wives a time to worship, attend Bible study, and enjoy fellowship. Four retreats are offered at key ministry milestones: year-3, year-10, year-25, and year-35. Attendance at these retreats has often run close to 75 percent of the pastors and wives invited.

Strengthening ministry

Grow in Grace seeks to deliver gospel-rich resources that assist pastors to partner with others in honestly evaluating all their callings and to plan for growth with confidence.

Grow in Grace has produced three essay/workbook resources 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.

Growth resources

Grow in Grace seeks to deliver informal resources useful for individual or group study that assist pastors to grow in all their callings.

The Shepherd's Study is an online collection of reviews on books in every area of theology. A team of parish pastors provides the reviews. The reviews are prepared for publication by two parish pastors who lead this effort. About 30 pastors partner in this effort.

The Four Branches Review is an e-newsletter shared with all pastors each month that offers a brief article of interest in each of the four areas of theological study. A team of four writers for each quarter prepares the articles in each of the four areas of theological study while another parish pastor serves as editor. About 20 pastors partner in this effort.

One last note on the current situation would also be appropriate. While measuring pastoral resignation numbers is certainly not the only way to measure how well we are doing as a synod in encouraging and strengthening pastors, it is worth noting the significant drop in resignation numbers when comparing the past two decades. From 2000–2009 there were 162 pastoral resignations in our synod. From 2010–2019 there were only 96 pastoral resignations in our synod. That is a 41 percent drop in resignations as compared decade to decade. Only God knows what he has used to help us retain a significantly higher percentage of our pastors. However, we trust that God has used some of the efforts recorded above to play a part in encouraging more pastors to continue to find joy under the cross in pastoral ministry.

It is our prayer that God would use our work, and the work of many others in our synod, to help an ever-increasing percentage of pastors to thrive under the cross in pastoral ministry for multiple decades. The blessings of such increased longevity in gospel ministry can hardly be overestimated as God uses such ministry to bless the souls within our synod's congregations, the pastors and their families themselves, and the other sheep those pastors assist us in reaching.

A look ahead

Grow in Grace will be under new leadership beginning in summer 2020. Prof. Thomas Kock is replacing Prof. Richard Gurgel as Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's director of continuing education since Gurgel is transitioning into a new call as president of Martin Luther College. Grow in Grace will be working on the following items in the next biennium.

Since Pastor Partners mentoring and the Celebration of Ministry retreats have proved a blessing to hundreds of pastors (and thousands of souls they serve), we will continue to look for ways to strengthen that support system so that it can continue to be a blessing for many more pastors (and their wives) in the years ahead.

We continue to work hard to move closer to our long-range goal of offering multiple courses each odd-numbered year in all 11 districts beyond the Southeastern Wisconsin District. We are thankful that plans are already in place for 2021 to offer district-wide satellites in 9 districts.

We also will be seeking to strengthen our on-campus Summer Quarter each even-numbered year. Even though in the summer of 2020 we needed to go all digital in the delivery of our courses, we still hope to welcome a significant percentage of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary classes of 2014 and 2015 to those digital classes. Special chapel devotions have been planned with Scripture texts and hymns that will call to mind their call day and graduation services from five or six years ago.

We hope to accelerate our exploration of opportunities to deliver growth resources in forms such as podcasts and brief videos. This could greatly expand our ability to reach even more pastors with what is produced for their growth and encouragement.

Grow in Grace will also continue to nurture a new partnership with the Commission on Congregational Counseling to provide readily accessible materials that pastors could use in partnership with lay leaders and ministry peers to evaluate how they are serving their Savior in all their various callings. Such tools would provide a welcome match to what the Commission on Congregational Counseling has produced to assist lay leaders in congregations to evaluate their congregation's ministry.

Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee

Rev. James Huebner, chairman and first vice president of WELS

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director of WELS Commission on Worship

Prof. Richard Gurgel, director of continuing education, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

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

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education

Teacher James Rademan, director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools

Commission on Inter-Church Relations

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. Members and representatives of the CICR assist individuals and churches around the world who are seeking to take confessional Lutheran stances. Finally, commission members stay abreast of happenings in other Lutheran church bodies around the world through periodical reading and with visits to church conventions, conferences, and symposia.

Our current situation

Organizational improvement

WELS continues to receive more and more inquiries from established and emerging churches around the globe who are looking for fellowship with WELS and for assistance in educating pastors in their countries. In the past, the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, the Board for World Missions (BWM), and the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have fielded these requests on a case-by-case basis. Because of the need for more coordination in this area, WELS President Mark Schroeder appointed Rev. Paul Prange to be the administrator of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations. Because Prange observed an increasing overlap between the work of World Missions and the work of the CICR, those CICR duties were recently reassigned to Rev. Larry Schlomer, the administrator for World Missions. His responsibilities now include coordinating the work of the BWM (oversight of ministry plans and financial matters) and the CICR (theological and doctrinal support). The Commission on Inter-Church Relations will continue to place liaisons on the World Missions administrative teams and to assign contact men to maintain the relationship between WELS and independent sister church bodies. Prange will continue to serve as the administrator for Ministerial Education and the chairman of the Joint Mission Council.

As more and more church bodies clarify their doctrinal stances and as confessional relationships with WELS are established, the Commission on Inter-Church Relations encourages these bodies to join the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC).

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

WELS is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which consists of 32 confessional Lutheran church bodies throughout the world that are in fellowship with one another.

The tenth triennial convention of the CELC was scheduled to be held May 29–June 1, 2020, in Seoul, South Korea, but because of the worldwide coronavirus outbreak, it has been rescheduled for a year later. The convention will still be hosted by Seoul Lutheran Church. The CELC Planning Committee has asked the CICR to work with them to urge church bodies within our fellowship who have not joined the CELC to become members of this worldwide organization, and several churches are expected to be applying for membership. At the 2021 convention, the CELC Planning Committee will also be proposing a number of changes to the constitution, including a change to eliminate the distinction between full and associate membership in the conference. More information can be found on the CELC website at celc.info.

The CELC Planning Committee has created a travel assistance fund for representatives of CELC member churches who need help paying for the travel costs involved with participation in CELC conventions. Interested individuals can donate to this fund through both the CELC website and the WELS website at wels.net/donate.

North America

Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) is our sister synod in America with whom we have been in fellowship since its organization in 1918. The CICR interacts with the ELS on a regular basis in order to foster the unity of faith that we treasure with this church body.

Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

The CICR continues to monitor developments in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), with whom WELS suspended fellowship in 1961. The latest in a series of informal meetings between leaders of WELS, the ELS, and the LCMS was held in December 2019. Topics of discussion were pastoral ministry and prayer fellowship. While all three churches' representatives at these informal meetings agree that fellowship between the ELS and WELS on the one hand and the LCMS on the other is not imminent, all three agree that there is benefit in continuing the informal talks.

Church of the Lutheran Confession

Prof. John Brenner, former chairman of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, has been involved in talks with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) for the past few years. In 2015 he was involved along with leaders from WELS, the ELS, and the CLC in drafting a document entitled "Joint Statement Regarding Termination of Fellowship," which, it was hoped, would be an initial step in the path to establishing fellowship between WELS/the ELS and the CLC. Although the drafters of the statement, including the representatives of the CLC, agreed on the principles articulated in the document, the CLC's General Pastoral Conference in 2017 recommended that the 2018 CLC convention not adopt the statement.

The 2018 CLC convention said, "We acknowledge with joy that the 'Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship' is a scripturally sound presentation of doctrinal principles." But the convention did not formally accept the statement, saying that it "does NOT resolve all of the issues involving the doctrine of fellowship." It should be noted that the statement was never intended to resolve all issues but was to serve as a necessary first step. So, the CLC neither formally accepted nor rejected the statement but instead resolved to make a final decision on the statement at its 2020 convention. The CLC 2018 convention expressed the hope that discussions could continue in the meantime, and a meeting between WELS and CLC representatives took place in 2019.

South America

The Commission on Inter-Church Relations is closely monitoring the many positive developments in Central and South America as the Lord blesses the work of the WELS Latin America team through its Academia Cristo website and courses.

Europe

Commission on Inter-Church Relations representatives have attended the CELC Europe conferences as well as retreats and symposia sponsored by European churches of our fellowship. The CICR is pleased that Rev. Larry Schlomer has taken responsibility for working with the church body of our fellowship in war-torn Ukraine.

Asia

In November 2018, CICR member Rev. Thomas Fricke was privileged to attend the CELC Asia-Oceania conference. Sponsored by South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM) in Hong Kong, the conference brought together people from CELC church bodies in Japan, Indonesia, India, South Korea, East Asia, Australia, and Hong Kong as well as from anticipated CELC member churches in the Philippines and Taiwan.

The 2019 WELS convention delegates made a formal declaration of church fellowship with the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church (CLEC) in Taiwan. Begun by WELS in 1968, it has grown to four congregations with two national pastors and two evangelists.

Africa

The 2019 WELS convention delegates also made a formal declaration of church fellowship with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya (LCMC–Kenya). Swedish missionaries brought Lutheranism to Kenya in 1948, and in 1963 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya (ELCK) became an independent church body. Over time, however, the ELCK began to tolerate false teachings in its fellowship, and a group of Kenyan pastors broke away and began searching for a confessional Lutheran church body. In 2015, Rev. Mark Anariko Onunda of the LCMC–Kenya met with the Doctrinal Committee of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Zambia Synod and with WELS representatives and presented a formal request for fellowship. After three years of subsequent doctrinal discussions, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Zambia Synod made a formal declaration of church fellowship with the LCMC–Kenya.

A look ahead

Prof. James Danell has been elected to serve as the next chairman of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, replacing Dr. John Brenner, who has finished his term. We thank Brenner for his years of faithful service.

Rev. Paul Prange, reporter

Prof. James Danell, chairman
Prof. Bill Tackmier, secretary
Rev. Jonathan Balge
Rev. Bart Brauer
Rev. Thomas Fricke
Rev. Steven Lange
Prof. Joel Otto
Rev. Benjamin Tomczak
Dr. Keith Wessel
Prof. Bradley Wordell

Ex officio:

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Advisory:

Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president

Prof. Earle Treptow, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Ministry of Christian Giving

Our calling

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving serves on behalf of the Conference of Presidents (COP) to encourage every WELS member to “excel in the grace of giving” through Christ. It is our privilege to help God’s people offer gifts to Jesus for his work in their congregations, synod, and other WELS organizations.

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 supplying congregations with encouraging information on ministry opportunities and needs as they prayerfully set their annual commitments. We also send them quarterly reports of their offerings to WELS.
- In the area of direct gifts from individuals, we regularly mail and e-mail appeals that explain our gospel work and encourage support of synodical ministries. We also 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. Also, the Ministry of Christian Giving supports Christian giving counselors (13.6 full-time equivalents as of March 1—four counselors are semi-retired and twelve are full-time) across all 12 districts of WELS to assist God’s people with gifts of any kind. Their services are free and confidential.
- Gifts from foundations often result from consultation between the director of the Ministry of Christian Giving, other synod leaders, and the foundations regarding funding of new ideas and enhancements to ministry.

Our current situation

Congregation Mission Offerings

The Ministry of Christian Giving coordinates with Communication Services to regularly 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 coordinated with our district chairmen. We are happy to report a record-setting 99 percent participation in the subscription setting process for 2019 (the average participation rate over the past ten years has been 96 percent).

In addition to the typical mailed and e-mailed information, we work with Communication Services to help the Conference of Presidents produce videos illustrating how God’s work through WELS touches each district. We praise

our Lord and thank our congregations for their steady offerings year after year, which are a generous response to Christ's love. (For details on Congregation Mission Offerings pledged and received in the 2019–21 biennium, see the Financial Results and Ministry Financial Plan on p. 53.)

Christian giving counselors

Through face-to-face visits and presentations, our Christian giving counselors invite faith-prompted support of WELS ministries. During each of the past 12 fiscal years (FY08–FY19), the Christian giving counselors have averaged (per full-time equivalent [FTE]) 286 meaningful face-to-face donor visits and have nurtured an average (per FTE) of \$486,526 in immediate gifts (12-year total of \$75 million) and \$2,416,435 in deferred expectancies (12-year total of \$375.4 million). In the first eight and one-half months of fiscal year 2019–20, WELS Christian giving counselors (13.6 FTEs) conducted 2,295 free, confidential visits with God's people and 198 presentations (Christian stewardship, Christian estate planning, WELS Mission and Ministry) that helped facilitate \$7 million in gifts received for WELS and \$18.1 million in deferred expectancies for congregations, synod, and other WELS organizations. For the 2019–21 biennium, our church body will annually invest approximately \$1.6 million in our giving counselors and about \$500,000 in our office staff so we may serve Jesus, his gifted people, and our areas of ministry. In view of the 12-year totals for immediate gifts and deferred expectancies mentioned above, we thank our Lord for the generous return he's given our investment in the Ministry of Christian Giving.

Mr. Gerry Heckmann, who served for 30 years as a Christian giving counselor focusing on Christian estate planning in the Western Wisconsin District, and Rev. Jonathan Stern, who served for 6 years as a Christian giving counselor focusing on current gifts in the Arizona-California District, fully retire on June 30, 2020. We thank Jesus and these men for their faithful service and we pray that the Lord richly blesses their wives and them in their full retirement.

Special offerings

WELS Conference of Presidents approves special offering partnerships between the Ministry of Christian Giving and areas of ministry that are shared by WELS Christian giving counselors with individual donors. The 2018–19 campaign, *For the Generations to Come*, is helping WELS Congregational Services strengthen the evangelism and member retention endeavors of our congregations. God blessed this effort with more than \$695,000 in gifts. Praise the Lord!

The special synodwide emphasis called *Grace–Hmong outreach in Vietnam* to encourage offerings to purchase land in Hanoi, Vietnam, build and outfit a theological training center, and provide two years' worth of support to train members of the Hmong Fellowship Church concluded in January 2020. God graciously moved his people to offer more than \$2.4 million in gifts, surpassing the \$2 million goal.

From July 2019 through June 2021, the Ministry of Christian Giving is partnering with Martin Luther College to present "Equipping Christian Witnesses" (ECW) to both congregations and individuals. Through the first nine months of the campaign, our Ministry of Christian Giving/Martin Luther College team conducted 1,860 meaningful donor visits and is encouraging churches in all 12 districts to consider holding an "Equipping Christian Witnesses" Sunday during the 2020–21 school year. Thanks to our Savior, we've already received gifts, donor advised funds distributions, pledges, and church commitments totaling over \$1.63 million for this synodwide initiative that focuses on recruitment of future ministerial education students, tuition assistance, and facilities. Congregations can learn how they may participate in the campaign by going to mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign, clicking on the ECW Campaign Toolbox, and downloading the congregational guidelines or ECW Sunday materials.

Appeals

The Ministry of Christian Giving works closely with our WELS areas of ministry and ministerial education schools to send about 14 mailed appeals as well as e-appeals each year. Each of the synod's four main areas of ministry receives two of the annual mailed appeal slots and several 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. One or two of the annual appeals encourage specialized gifts such as a charitable gift annuity or qualified charitable distributions from an IRA. The appeals coordinate with other WELS media including *WELS Connection*, *Forward in Christ*, WELS' websites, and the "Together" e-newsletter. Appeals have produced an average net income of \$953,513 per year since fiscal year 2010.

WELS endowment funds

The Ministry of Christian Giving is working toward building up the WELS endowment funds for the benefit of WELS Missions and Ministerial Education. As of early 2020 the WELS endowments had \$27.5 million in immediate

gifts with another \$64.8 million expected from deferred gifts arranged by donors working with Christian giving counselors. The 2019 distribution from these endowments totaled \$917,161, including \$508,123 to Missions and \$409,038 to Ministerial Education.

We also encourage gifts to the WELS Operating Endowment Fund, which as of the end of 2019 had a balance of \$1,819,203. In 2019 this fund distributed \$63,230 to WELS.

Encouragement of planned gifts

The Ministry of Christian Giving revised and mailed a new congregational planned giving manual to churches in 2019. This publication helps congregations jump-start a program of promoting 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.

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, so donors can direct distributions to their church, synod, or other WELS ministry to save on taxes, then use the cash they would have given for other needs. The Ministry of Christian Giving is working with WELS Foundation to inform donors and churches of this opportunity and to provide resources to assist at wels.net/qcd.

Reviews of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving

At the suggestion of the WELS Foundation Board and through their generous financial support approved by the Conference of Presidents and Synodical Council, WELS Ministry of Christian Giving hired Sharpe Group in late 2017 to assess our planned giving communication efforts and create a five-year planned giving communication plan to enhance our service to WELS donors and the long-term financial stability of WELS areas of ministry and WELS-affiliated ministries. Goals of the planned giving communication program include increasing the number of known commitments to WELS ministry as well as seeing a growth in the number of matured (i.e., received) gifts in the coming years. Sharpe reviewed our program and concluded we are doing many things well. They also had some recommendations to enhance our planned giving communications. We have added available data to our database to help us better serve our constituents. We also began a planned giving newsletter, *Grace of Giving*, in 2019 to share ministry updates and planned giving options. As of the time of this writing, other suggested actions steps from Sharpe Group (including hiring an additional office staff member to assist with the work) are on hold pending the Bentz Whaley Flessner review.

The Conference of Presidents has signed a contract with the development consulting firm Bentz Whaley Flessner to provide a “top to bottom review of WELS MCG,” with a special focus on building a major gifts program. The assessment is expected to be concluded by the end of May, and the report and recommendations will be received in June.

Development counsel to other organizations

We annually offer 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’s 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. Eighteen people participated in our January 2020 training.

WELS-affiliated ministries can arrange a part-time “collaborative partnership” with the Ministry of Christian Giving where our counselors represent their organizations on visits with members. This allows both WELS and the WELS-affiliated ministries to broaden their audiences of prospective supporters. Since November 2016, the Ministry of Christian Giving and Arizona Lutheran Academy have enjoyed serving donors together. Great Plains Lutheran High School will begin a part-time collaborative development partnership with the Ministry of Christian Giving in July.

Statistical report

Under the direction of the Conference of Presidents, the Ministry of Christian Giving has gathered data to produce the annual WELS Statistical Report. We provide instructions to churches at the turn of each year and directly follow up with them through our MCG district chairmen. The congregational participation rate in the process this year was 96 percent (over the last ten years the rate of participation has climbed from about 80 percent up to 95+ percent). WELS statistics help us see how we are collectively ministering with the gospel and assist us in forming plans to better share

Jesus with God's blessing.

A look ahead

Following are our goals and plans for 2020 and beyond:

- We will work with Communication Services and the Conference of Presidents to communicate with congregations regarding 2021 Congregation Mission Offering subscription setting, including production of a special video to encourage Congregation Mission Offerings.
- We plan to continue encouraging gifts to WELS through our annual appeal program and counselor visits and presentations.
- We will work with the Conference of Presidents to map out our future steps (e.g., goals, procedures, office and field staff levels, etc.) in response to the Bentz Whaley Flessner review.

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving is privileged to serve our Savior and you by helping to fund the ministries that touch the hearts of WELS members. 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

Our calling

Communication Services exists to assist the Conference of Presidents in communicating the mission of WELS to the members of the synod. It is responsible for the 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 working on the synod's major communication initiatives. The most important initiative this year was the redesign and new digital resources of *Forward in Christ*, WELS' official monthly magazine. Since the first issue of the WELS periodical, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, in January 1914, we have continued to publish a synodwide publication. It has undergone a name change and other changes including most recently a redesign in 2004 and another in 2010. We have enjoyed a faithful and dedicated group of readers over the years, but not only is our world changing around us but WELS is also undergoing some declining membership changes. Those changes contributed to a drop in readership from 65,000 in 2004 to about 35,000 today. We chose to study how we might address the changes and increase the reader base.

From the beginning, the magazine has retained a constant mission even if we have not always articulated it clearly. So in early January 2019 the first step was to clarify the mission statement for the magazine. We concluded that the magazine should

- help readers grow in their Christian faith;
- encourage readers to live as Christians in a secular world;
- provide ways for them to gain a deeper personal perspective on Christian life and challenges;
- inform members what's going on within WELS;
- nurture the sense that the reader is part of something bigger than his or her local church; and
- broaden the information, insights, and perspectives the readers receive in their local congregations.

The *Forward in Christ* staff together with WELS Communication Services and Northwestern Publishing House funded an extensive reader survey. We contracted with Signet Research and NPS Media Group to develop the questions with us and conduct the readers' survey.

The consultants presented their reports based on the feedback they received from more than 5,300 readers. They highlighted four areas that could help us improve the magazine and appeal to more readers. They were redesign, marketing initiatives, content review, and the development of a website and social media channels dedicated to *Forward in Christ*. We set January 2020 as the launch date for the new initiatives we identified and then spent the next several months developing and implementing a plan.

In redesigning the magazine, we chose to retain the same page count and retain the most important features read by a majority of our readers. We also agreed that *Forward in Christ* should take on a more contemporary look, with brighter and thicker paper, with more pictures and graphics to make it more interesting to readers.

The consultants' report suggested an enhanced approach to marketing. The enhancements include a more robust encouragement for subscriptions. The report included ways to improve the subscription process and suggested ways to help congregations distribute *Forward in Christ* to their members. We created and distributed a counter magazine holder for congregations, which was designed to increase the visibility of the magazine. In addition, with each bulk shipment to our congregations we include a special highlight page for pastors entitled "Share what's inside" so that pastors could refer to these highlights when the magazine is delivered to their congregation each month.

An equally ambitious effort involved the discussion and improvements in the content for the magazine. The survey highlighted what current readers like about *Forward in Christ*. Those features included the devotions, the Bible studies, and the Q&A. Perhaps the most important feature was "Confessions of Faith," the stories of those people the Holy Spirit brought to faith. These features we wanted to retain in our content revision. However, based on the survey, we saw there were some opportunities for improvement. We improved the "Table of contents" page, shortening it to allow us some additional space for features. We added a new Bible study to the Q&A related to the topic discussed in the answer to the question. We included a page of photos entitled "This is WELS" so we could publish more photos of WELS members.

We added two new features. The first is a larger Q&A feature entitled "Please explain . . ." Each month an author answers a new question related to the Bible readings members will hear at worship that month. The second is similar. It too is geared to the month's congregational readings but the author addresses an important truth we glean from those readings. We wanted these two features to complement Sunday worship and perhaps allow pastors to create discussion in their Bible classes with the insights from FIC authors.

A new dedicated *Forward in Christ* website, **forwardinchrist.net**, and social media pages were developed to carry that community further by offering readers ways to interact with monthly articles as well as share their own stories. The website is another way for us to engage with our readers and with the addition of *Forward in Christ* Facebook and Instagram social media sites, our members will have multiple ways to access and share the engaging content delivered each month by the magazine. At **forwardinchrist.net** you can also sign up to receive a free weekly e-newsletter filled with articles, photos, and sneak peeks, delivered right to your e-mail inbox. Communication Services absorbed the costs for the website development, and the staff continues to create and maintain all content for the website and complementary social media channels.

All this came into focus in the January issue of the magazine. We cannot do what our pastors do in their local congregations, but we do want to partner with them in bringing comfort, encouragement, and strength to God's people. Our goal is to continue to provide quality information and insight for God's people in our congregations as well as provide a credible witness to our faith in Jesus and his Word.

A look ahead

Besides the synod's magazine, the Communication Services' staff continues to produce the following consistent and ongoing content:

- *WELS Connection*, the monthly video viewed in more than 900 congregations, is entering its 33rd year of providing stories that highlight the important work happening as a result of our Congregation Mission Offerings to the synod. *Forward in Christ* and *WELS Connection* have the proven ability to reach tens of thousands of people each month with uplifting stories and important information every member should know. We truly appreciate the strong partnership we share with our congregations that choose to subscribe to these inspirational products.
- Due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic we offered several free resources to help our members stay connected to WELS during this time of unrest and change. These resources included digital access to *Forward in Christ* magazine, *Kids Connection*, and *WELS Connection* videos during the spring and early summer.

- “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. We also produce a bi-weekly “Together” video update the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. We highlight important and interesting synod news in a short video that features an interview with a newsmaker.
- Communication Services remains committed and able to continue developing content for all other essential internal communication tools, including *Book of Reports and Memorials*, convention delegate’s booklet, *Report to the Twelve Districts, Proceedings*—the official record of each synod convention, livestreaming major WELS events, and video reporting of convention proceedings.
- Working with both Martin Luther College and the Ministry of Christian Giving, we are creating content to promote and encourage our members to participate in the college’s two-year “Equipping Christian Witnesses” campaign. We will continue to feature stories of the progress of the Martin Luther College campaign pillars routinely in *Forward in Christ*, *WELS Connection*, and the “Together” e-newsletter.
- Briana Lambrecht, Creative Services coordinator, designed a new **lutheranleadership.com** website under Rev. Jon Hein’s direction to support the WELS National Lutheran Leadership Conference. Fourteen promotional videos were produced to encourage members to attend. Fifteen hours of video presentations from the sold-out leadership conference are being added to the website during the next few months.
- Detailed information regarding the proposed changes to the WELS retirement program was created and made available to called workers and sponsoring organizations synodwide during January 2020. The various communication materials are available at **welsbpo.net**.
- Ann Jahns joined the Communication Services team on Jan. 27 as our new marketing coordinator. Ann brings more than 20 years of marketing and communications experience. She recently served as director of marketing and communications for Christian Family Solutions and is a contributing author for *Forward in Christ* magazine. More than 50 percent of her salary and benefits are provided by WELS Investment Funds, WELS Foundation, and WELS Church Extension Fund.

Communication Services’ team consists of highly skilled writers and creative content producers who are experienced professionals that love their Lord and their synod. They approach every story, promotional project, and ministry campaign with a servant’s heart. We are thankful to have the opportunity to lead such a dedicated team.

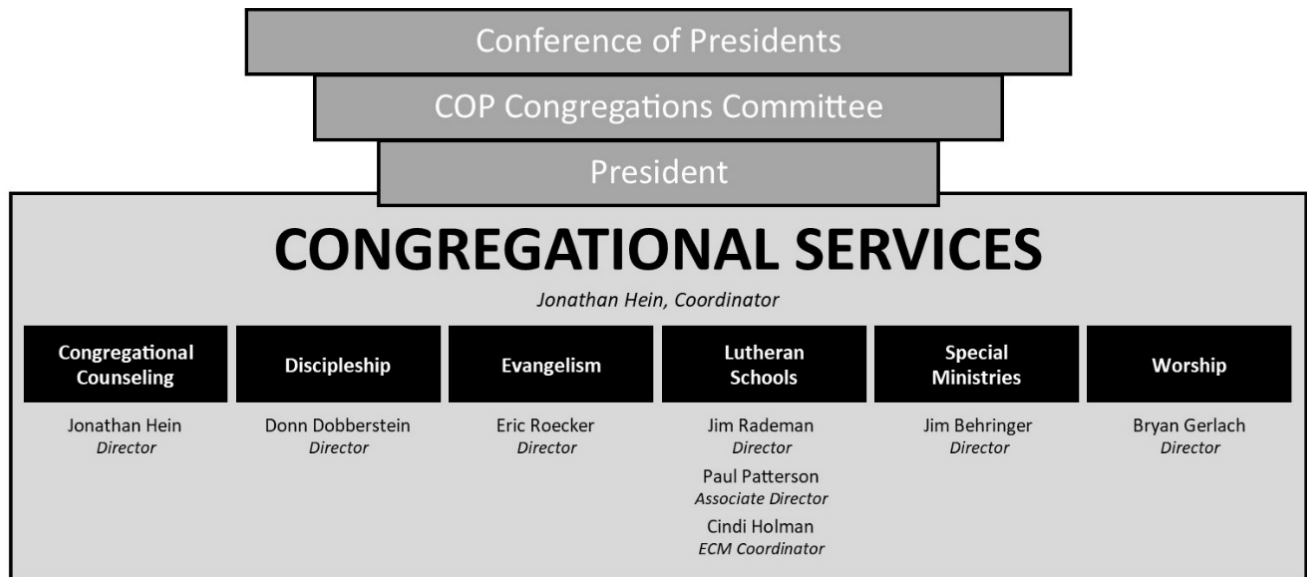
Mr. Lee Hitter and Rev. John Braun, reporters

Congregational Services

Our calling

WELS Congregational Services exists to encourage and equip congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry. Congregational Services serves under the Conference of Presidents (COP). It consists of six commissions—Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, Evangelism, Lutheran Schools, Special Ministries, and Worship—which give focused attention to specific areas of congregational life. Commissions work with district coordinators to identify common needs within WELS parishes and schools. Those commissions then provide resources, training, and personal assistance to help meet those needs.

For the synod to carry out its global mission, it needs to have the support of a broad swath of healthy congregations. WELS’ ministerial education system, world mission efforts, and home missions are all predicated upon having a broad base of congregations to support those efforts. Thus, by serving local congregations, Congregational Services hopes also to assist in the worldwide gospel efforts of WELS.



Our current situation

God's role and our role in meeting the challenges

In 2017, at the request of the Conference of Presidents, Congregational Services produced a comprehensive demographic study that delineated the challenges all Christian churches are facing in 21st-century, post-Christian America. The study illustrated that while WELS is faring better than many Christian churches, the synod is at something of a crossroads. It quantified what it would mean if long-established trends in various types of gains (e.g. births, adult confirmations) and losses (e.g. deaths, back-door losses) continue unabated in WELS. In the next generation, WELS would lose between 75,000 and 123,000 members and more than 200 churches. In two generations, WELS would be about one third the size it is today.

St. Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." Note, God is the one who grants all growth, spiritual and statistical. However, Scripture says he does that work through the Church as it proclaims his gospel: planting, watering. Thus, in that 2017 demographic report, Congregational Services shared the motto: "If we are doing all we can with the gospel, the numbers don't matter."

That truth cannot be over-stressed. It is important that churches look at numbers and use statistics. That is part of the way we use the First Article gift of reason—to be stewards of the gifts the Lord of the Church has entrusted to us. Forecasts help us plan for the future (all the time remembering that only the Lord knows the future). Statistics can help us determine if a ministry effort is worth continuing, or if it is time to divert the human and financial resources from that effort to some new effort. For example, if a congregation spends \$2,000 to send a mass mailing inviting the community to Easter services, and year after year no one comes, it probably would be good stewardship to divert the money and time spent on those mailings to some other gospel effort. So we must look at numbers.

However, we must not be consumed by them. Forever and always, "God has been making [the church] grow" when and where he sees fit. When churches become consumed with numbers, it can lead to two places: sinful pride if they have statistical increase or sinful despair if they do not. To avoid this, we must continually remember what our role is and is not, what we can do and what we cannot do. We cannot cause the church to grow. But we can plan to do all we can with the gospel. After that, we let the Holy Spirit accomplish what he will with our efforts.

Congregational Services is committed to helping congregations approach ministry with that emphasis. In the fall of 2017, the six commissions put together a strategic plan for how we might partner with congregations as they attempt to "do all [they] can with the gospel" in three areas:

- *Feeding the flock*—Congregational Services would partner with congregations and their members in the endeavor to nourish the saints with the Word of God. We believed the plan needed to encompass everything from corporate worship to the family altar to personal devotional life.
- *Reaching the lost*—Congregational Services would help congregations and their members increase personal witnessing efforts. While we believe there will always be a place for corporate outreach (mass mailings, Facebook

ads, canvassing efforts), to reach the lost in post-Christian America will require Christians to be willing to build relationships with unchurched acquaintances and then follow Christ's calling: "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

- *Retaining the straying*—Congregational Services would assist congregations in identifying common times for members to drift away from the Means of Grace: college, empty nesters, etc. We would help congregations develop ministry efforts to aggressively and lovingly pursue straying members.

Recent efforts

The following are some projects, initiatives, and emphases that came out of that plan.

"C & E" programs

"C & E" programs are joint efforts of multiple commissions to capitalize on days in the Church Year where unchurched individuals are likely to attend. It kicked off with C18. C18 had resources that encouraged and trained WELS members to ask unchurched friends, neighbors, and coworkers to attend Christmas Eve 2018 ("reaching the lost"). It had worship and family devotional resources for Advent and Christmas ("feeding the flock"). The primary goal was to invite one million people to a WELS Christmas Eve worship service. About 1.2 million postcard invitations were sent. Thousands of WELS members invited unchurched acquaintances. An exit survey indicated about ten percent of WELS congregations had their historic high Christmas Eve attendance.

C18 was followed by C19 and E20. (The "E" indicating an Easter worship/outreach program.) The "C & E" efforts will continue and expand in upcoming years. They provide customizable resources for congregations. Most of those resources are free, available at welscongregationalservices.net.

Welcome Home

The primary focus of the *Welcome Home* initiative was on "retaining the straying." It included a video-based elder training program to help pastors equip more men for this important discipleship effort, worship resources for holding a *Welcome Home* Sunday, and a Bible study to equip members to welcome back those who had drifted from church. Just over 60 percent of WELS congregations used some components of *Welcome Home*. Of those that did, 58 percent reported having delinquent members who returned.

The *Welcome Home* resources are not tied to any single year. If your congregation didn't utilize *Welcome Home* but would like to in the future, resources can be found at welscongregationalservices.net.

Compassion ministry

At the 2019 synod convention, the Commission on Special Ministries revealed its *Love in Action* publication. Moreover, Pastor Jonathan Hein, coordinator for Congregational Services, stressed the important role of compassion ministry in post-Christian America. Compassion ministry seeks to serve those with special spiritual and/or physical needs. Individuals with special needs are among the most spiritually underserved people in America. Thus, compassion ministry plays a role in both "feeding the flock" and "reaching the lost."

Some of the compassion ministry resources that are offered include the Mission for the Visually Impaired, which records Lutheran audio books for a new WELS audio library that is free for the blind. The Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing works to close caption spiritual resources. The Mental Health Needs Committee created a training module for congregations that seek to become "recovery friendly" churches. Conquerors through Christ shares resources to help congregations, families, and individuals deal with the pervasive challenge of pornography. Freedom for the Captives created the "Standing Up for Children" online training for church leaders in the effort to prevent abuse and provide spiritual care for abuse survivors. Military Services created online training for military contact pastors. WELS Prison Ministry created a correspondence course, "Dealing with Depression and Anxiety," to spiritually serve prisoners, both incarcerated WELS members and unchurched individuals.

WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership

This conference was held in January 2020 at the Sheraton Grand Hotel in downtown Chicago. The goal was to bring together called workers and lay leaders to discuss the challenges before American Christianity. The 5 plenary sessions dealt with congregational culture issues facing every WELS church. The 25 breakout sessions shared tactics and "best practices" for a broad spectrum of ministry issues: retaining and gaining Millennials and Gen Z, equipping members for service, utilizing small groups, large church management, rural evangelism, making better use of the gifts of women, using social media, etc.

Not certain how many would attend this first conference, the steering committee set the ambitious goal of 600. Registrations eventually had to be capped at 800. There were hundreds more on the waiting list. The exit survey

of attendees indicated that virtually all plan to attend the next National Conference on Lutheran Leadership. It will be held in 2022, most likely at the same time of year and again in Chicago. Information will be available at lutheranleadership.com.

Young member retention efforts

Each year, WELS loses approximately 8,000 members out the back door; i.e., they leave the Christian church altogether. About half of those are college-aged young adults. One of the aims of the WELS International Youth Rally is to prepare young WELS members to face the challenges they will experience in secondary education. The 2020 rally needed to be canceled but planning is already underway for the 2022 rally.

Ultimately, youth retention efforts are something that take place most effectively on the congregational level. Thus, the Commission on Discipleship has been overhauling the Transformed youth resources. The updated resources will better help congregations create a strategic plan for addressing the cultural temptations youth face daily. The program will be designed to be scalable, so it can be used in small, medium, and large church settings.

Congregational evangelism kit

This new resource provides video-based training for evangelism leaders and committees to assist them in implementing key components of congregational evangelism, including: how to provide a welcoming worship environment for guests, how to follow up on worship guests, how to set up and maintain a prospect database, and more. The videos, along with supplementary written materials, are available at welscongregationalservices.net.

Church/School consultations

Sometimes congregations benefit from a facilitator helping them examine, assess, and if necessary, adjust their ministry efforts. The two commissions most heavily involved in this are Congregational Counseling and Lutheran Schools.

Congregational Counseling offers a three-tiered consultation approach, with each program building on each other. The Self-Assessment and Adjustment Program helps churches analyze their current ministry programs and better understand their community. A congregational counselor helps the church produce an action plan to make tactical adjustments to certain ministry efforts. The AXIS Program walks churches through the steps of long-range strategic planning. The Ministry Organization & Staffing Evaluation helps churches examine their volunteerism potential, human resource needs, and church governance and organization. The goal is to make sure those things align well with a long-range plan.

Lutheran Schools operates WELS School Accreditation, a process in which schools evaluate current education practices and seek sound methods to build upon strengths and determine new ways to grow and strengthen the educational ministry of the school. We are thankful for the years of service Teacher Tom Plitzuweit provided in this effort as associate director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools. Plitzuweit has accepted a call to serve as principal at St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis. We ask God to bless the efforts of his successor, Teacher Paul Patterson.

Lutheran Schools also provides onsite consultations for early childhood ministries (ECMs): how to set them up, the options for structure and staffing, etc. The *Telling the Next Generation* program is designed to help Lutheran schools and early childhood ministries plan and implement harvest strategies, so that these youth ministries might better serve as outreach efforts of the congregation.

In the past year, a major focus of Lutheran Schools has been in delivering face-to-face training modules for school leaders and teachers. These modules encourage continued learning and growth of teachers, with the aim of improved student learning through instructional coaching and ministry development plans.

As more congregations are facing growing challenges, the requests for these consultations has grown exponentially. To help meet those demands, Lutheran Schools issued a two-year part-time call to Teacher Jim Sievert to help with school consultations. The Conference of Presidents is currently calling for a full-time congregational counselor to assist with church consultations.

10 for 10 stewardship emphasis

One of the challenges that parish pastors commonly cite is helping members overcome the scourge of materialism, the 21st-century equivalent of the idol Baal. The Commission on Discipleship produced the *10 for 10* emphasis as a tool for congregations to discuss the privilege and joys of financial stewardship. A three-week worship series with Bible study was followed by an encouragement for ten weeks of enhanced giving. In an exit survey of congregations that utilized the emphasis, about two-thirds of churches reported their members expressed increased joy or

satisfaction in their financial stewardship, which was the aim of the program. The aim of *10 for 10* was not to improve the budgetary situation in congregations. However, for the majority of congregations, that seems to have been an ancillary benefit.

Hymnal Project

In Congregational Services, we believe that the highpoint of the week is when the saints gather around Word and Sacrament. Not only is that a time vital for “feeding the flock,” but when members invite their unchurched and unbelieving friends to church where the gospel is clearly proclaimed in word and song, that service also serves the aim of “reaching the lost.” Thus, the Commission on Worship has placed a heavy focus on the Hymnal Project in recent years. The Hymnal Project Executive Committee met for its 22nd and last face-to-face meeting in November 2019 to make final decisions about hymnal content. Since that time, the focus of the Hymnal Project work has shifted to Northwestern Publishing House production (editing, design/layout, and copyright permissions) and the Hymnal Introduction Program. January 2020 saw the launch of **christianworship.com**. The new hymnal resources were previewed to the attendees of the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership.

A look ahead

Upcoming efforts

As mentioned, the programs, initiatives, and efforts described above are part of a long-term plan to help congregations in their effort to feed the flock, reach the lost, and retain the straying. What is next? Here are some highlights.

“Let’s Go!” personal witnessing training

Using video-based instruction and corresponding study guides, *Let’s Go!* will provide practical instruction for personal witnessing. The program can be used by an individual Christian, a small-group Bible study gathering, or a large-group Bible study. All of the resources can be accessed for free at **welscongregationalservices.net**. It will be ready before the end of 2020.

Along with personal witnessing training, the Commission on Evangelism is producing resources to help congregations create an “outreach culture.” The prayer is that these resources will help every Christian at every congregation see evangelism as something they can do regularly and confidently as part of their Christian lives.

“Entertaining Angels” hospitality evangelism

Scripture teaches that God has determined the times and places that we live. The street you live on is not accidental. Your next-door neighbors are not random. God’s fingers are in all aspects of our lives. This video-based training will equip members to see the opportunities God has placed before them by bringing them in contact with unchurched and unbelieving individuals. It will encourage members to open their homes to these people, not to be showy (“Look at what a good entertainer I am!”) but simply to build authentic relationships with those not yet part of God’s kingdom. As those relationships deepen, it will help members see how to turn conversations spiritual as the Lord provides opportunity.

Marriage and family programs

The health of a congregation will typically correlate with the health of families. A major focus of Congregational Services in the near future is providing programs that help the family.

The marriage enrichment retreats offered by the Commission on Discipleship will be overhauled. The goal is to hold a minimum of 50 events in 2021 through 2023 in geographically strategic locations, places that would allow up to 75 percent of WELS marriages to be served.

Online, marriage-based Bible study videos are being produced, with a target of late fall 2020 for the first releases. They can be used as congregational studies, in small groups, or simply for a couple’s home devotion.

Regular online family devotionals are being produced. Currently, WELS’ online daily devotion is used by tens of thousands of people daily. These streaming family devotions will be written with children as the target audience. It is something parents and kids can use together as an after-dinner or pre-bedtime devotion.

WELS National Worship Conference

This conference will take place the first week of August 2021 at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wis. The conference will place a strong emphasis on the new hymnal resources, which are scheduled to be available later that year, starting in Advent 2021. The later than usual date was selected for two reasons. First, it puts the worship conference at a

time when it is not competing with other large groups at Carthage. Second, it assures that some key Hymnal Project resources are available.

Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities Ministry

The Commission on Special Ministries will create training for congregations to equip and empower them to serve families that have members with development needs. These families are most spiritually underserved. For example, the majority of families that have a child with autism do not have a church home. This training will help congregations welcome and serve these families with the gospel.

Walking Together circuit pastor/Congregational Services partnership

WELS Conference of Presidents has two groups that work under it as they serve the congregations within their respective districts: circuit pastors and Congregational Services. The *Walking Together* program partners these two groups. Congregational Services provides Bible studies, different types of analyses, and various planning tools for circuit pastors to use as they see fit.

Sunday School Task Force

WELS Sunday school attendance has dropped by 50 percent in one decade. Part of the reason is demographics; i.e. WELS has fewer members in that demographic. However, there seem to be other issues. The task force will identify the underlying reasons for the decline in Sunday school ministry and offer tactical recommendations for this youth discipleship effort moving forward. The report and recommendations will be available in early 2021.

Institute for Lutheran Apologetics

God-willing, the Institute for Lutheran Apologetics will hold its first meeting this fall. The Institute for Lutheran Apologetics serves under the Conference of Presidents. This working group discusses how to best utilize apologetics to prepare our young people to face an increasingly secular world and how to train our members to present their faith as a beautiful, intellectually robust worldview.

“Returning Citizens” Prison Ministry effort

Prison Ministry provides spiritual resources for those who are incarcerated. The “Returning Citizens” effort will include digital resources that help train congregational members to mentor inmates as they prepare to return to life outside of prison.

The UP Initiative

UP is intended to be a three-year effort, spanning 2022 through 2025. It has the goal of providing comprehensive resources, encouragement, and training to help congregations examine and expand gospel ministry efforts in key areas.

Summary

This does not describe everything the commissions in Congregational Services have done or are doing. For more information, please refer to the digital reports at wels.net/rtttd2020. Or contact any member of Congregational Services.

Finally, WELS Congregational Services is here to serve you. This is a grassroots organization. As mentioned previously, every program or initiative developed by any of the six commissions is the result of multiple congregations asking for help with some ministry effort. Please don't hesitate to let us know how we can do that better.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, reporter

Rev. James Behringer, director of WELS Commission on Special Ministries

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Commission on Discipleship

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director of WELS Commission on Worship

Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services and director of WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling

Teacher Cindi Holman, coordinator of WELS Early Childhood Ministries

Teacher Tom Plitzuweit, associate director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools

Teacher James Rademan, director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools

Rev. Eric Roecker, director of WELS Commission on Evangelism

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
- Expenses for the Accounting Oversight Committee
- 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
- Special support for displaced called workers
- Colloquy expenses

Synod Archives

WELS Historical Institute (see p. 81)

Publication Coordinating Commission (see p. 92 in the report of Northwestern Publishing House)

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

Financial Services

Human Resources

Facility Services

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

Synodical Council

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 also has the authority to act on behalf of the synod between conventions when proper and necessary. The Convention Compliance listing is included in this report (p. 33) and provides a summary of the progress made to date in implementing convention resolutions.

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.

Standing committees

The Synodical Council is organized into three standing committees. The Finance Committee is responsible for establishing the support forecast and for recommending the overall level of spending for budgetary planning. The Finance Committee also monitors the financial performance and works closely with the synod's chief financial officer to oversee the risk management, banking, and general financial situation of the synod. The Administration Committee is responsible for developing and implementing general policies and procedures; providing oversight of WELS' subsidiary organizations; overseeing WELS Human Resources and Technology; and providing 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 the synod's long-range plan.

The Finance Committee establishes the recommended spending levels based on the support forecast. The Ministry Committee then determines what portion of the available resources are allocated to each area of ministry. This arrangement, 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 special standing sub-committee that reports to the Administration Committee. The Compensation Review Committee reviews and recommends adjustments to the WELS compensation guidelines for called workers.

2019 convention compliance

The Synodical Council has the responsibility to monitor compliance with the resolutions passed by the synod in convention. A progress report on convention compliance can be found on p. 33 as Appendix 1.

Long-range plan

The Synodical Council continues to be guided by the synod's long-range plan, which was adopted in 2017 and extends to the year 2025. The plan can be found in Appendix 2 of this report on p. 34.

Final financial results for the year ending June 30, 2019

In November, the Synodical Council reviewed the financial results of FY19. Results showed great blessings on the financial position of the synod. Those results can be found in the financial section on p. 53.

In February, the Synodical Council also reviewed the financial results for the current year and projections for the coming year. That information can also be found in the financial section on p. 55.

A continuing concern is that Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) have increased only slightly over the past 11 years. An increase in expenditures of 2-3 percent is necessary simply to maintain the current operations of the synod, but Congregation Mission Offerings have not kept pace with that level of increase. In that same time period, grants from the Schwan Foundation have decreased from \$8 million to less than \$2 million annually. In addition to that, transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund are surpassing receipts into the fund and the trend projects the balance being drawn down at a higher rate than the Synodical Council would like. This highlights the need for congregations to do all they can to increase Congregation Mission Offerings from current levels. Since Congregation Mission Offerings have not increased sufficiently to cover inflationary increases or to enable the synod to address new mission opportunities, the Synodical Council encourages WELS members to consider remembering the work of the synod through individual gifts and through estate plans that include the work of the synod.

Despite less than needed CMO gifts and the decreased funding from the Schwan Foundation, revenue from unanticipated sources as well as concerted efforts by the Synodical Council, areas of ministry, and synodical schools to increase efficiency with fewer workers has enabled the synod not only to maintain its ministries but even to expand them. God continues to bless our synod with generous people and with undeserved financial resources. For complete financial information, please refer to the finance and budget information on p. 53.

Financial results through December 2020

- 2019 Congregation Mission Offering receipts were \$300,000 more than the total subscriptions.
- Financial Stabilization Fund (FSF) receipts from bequests, grants, and interest are projected to be higher than planned.
- Operating fund expenses are running less than planned in Congregation and District Ministries and Support Services. If this continues, it should result in a smaller than planned transfer from the Financial Stabilization Fund.
- All four synodical schools are projecting surpluses for the year.
- All four subsidiaries (WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, Church Extension Fund, Northwestern Publishing House) projected strong financial results, although these results could be affected by unstable market conditions.

Financial Stabilization Fund

The Financial Stabilization Fund enables timely adjustments to the synod's ministry financial plan in a way that helps to avoid sudden reductions to the synod's mission and ministry. To ensure that sufficient funds are available, the Synodical Council has established a target minimum amount that should be retained in the fund. Previously, the Synodical Council had set the target minimum at \$10 million. At its February meeting, the Synodical Council adopted a new policy that would allow the target minimum to fluctuate higher or lower depending on a formula that the Synodical Council established. The revised policy states:

1. The ending balance in the Financial Stabilization Fund should never be less than the receipts for the year.
2. The projected ending balance should never be more than two times the projected subsidy for the next year.
3. The projected ending balance should never be less than 110 percent of the planned/projected use for the year, plus 1.5 percent of Congregation Mission Offerings.
4. Annually increase the transfer if the balance has increased from the previous year and is expected to increase in the subsequent year.

Modifications to the current ministry financial plan

The Synodical Council is authorized to make necessary and/or prudent modifications to the ministry financial plan adopted by the synod in convention. Entities that desire to exceed that level of spending may request that the Synodical Council modify the approved spending level, provided that the entity can demonstrate that it has the funds available and that no additional synodical operating funds will be used. In November, the Synodical Council approved FY20 expenditures for World Missions of \$500,000 from their special funds for the initial work to be done in the Hmong Vietnam effort, an additional staff member for Communication Services (no operating funding required), the additional use of \$273,000 in special funds at Martin Luther College to cover lower than anticipated tuition revenue in FY20, and a full-time director for WELS Christian Aid and Relief, utilizing special funds in FY20 and FY21. Additionally, the Synodical Council approved an item from the unfunded priority list, an additional Congregational Counselor in Congregational Services. Funding for this item will be through additional synod support of \$50,000 in FY20 and \$100,000 in FY21. In February, the Synodical Council approved requests to increase the cost of the Knight Center at Martin Luther College, subject to approved funding and the ability to fund ongoing operational costs, as well as Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's request to construct an additional home on campus from special funds. Neither of these approvals requires additional synod support in FY20 or FY21.

Ministry financial plan for the next biennium

Even though the next ministry financial plan will not be adopted until the 2021 synod convention, work has already begun to develop the plan that will be recommended by the Synodical Council. An initial support forecast is prepared early in the process (a forecast that is reviewed and modified as necessary) as the ministry financial plan is developed. Based on the support forecast adopted by the Synodical Council at its February 2020 meeting, the Synodical Council directed the president and the areas of ministry to proceed with the following assumptions:

- synod support of \$30,040,000 for each year of the biennium (no increase from the FY21 plan),
- wage increase of 2.5 percent for each year of the biennium,
- health care cost increase of 6.5 percent for both years,
- retirement program cost increases of 5 percent in both years, and
- increases of costs in other areas from 2.5 percent to 5 percent.

In addition to the plan that assumed no increase in synodical support, the Synodical Council also requests an alternate plan that reflects the assumptions listed above and that identifies the level of support needed to maintain all synod ministry at current levels.

Each area of ministry and synodical department submits its proposed ministry plans and requested support amount to the president. The president, in view of the established priorities of the synod and the long-range plan, and with input from the areas of ministry, crafts a draft comprehensive ministry financial plan. This draft is reviewed by the President's Advisory Council. The members of the President's Advisory Council—as representatives from all areas of ministry and synodical departments—review the plan proposal and make suggestions for modifications. The President's Advisory Council then adopts the plan with amendments and recommends it to the Synodical Council. The Ministry Committee of the Synodical Council then reviews the plan and makes any necessary or beneficial changes. After discussion and further input, the Synodical Council adopts the plan and forwards it to the synod convention for discussion and approval.

This process has been followed for 10 years and has served the synod well. All areas of ministry have demonstrated a great deal of brotherly cooperation and the ability to consider the overall needs of the synod.

Partial self-insurance of health care

Three years ago, the Synodical Council enacted a partial self-insurance of health care for synod workers. In the first three years of the program, savings have exceeded estimates by more than \$800,000, providing additional resources to areas of ministry.

Unfunded priority list

When the synod in convention adopts a ministry financial plan, it also establishes the unfunded priority list. This list includes projects that were not funded by the plan but that could be funded if resources become available. In November, the Synodical Council was able to provide \$150,000 for Congregational Services, the top priority.

Other items still on the unfunded priority list are:

1. Board for Home Missions: Mission expansion—\$125,000
2. Board for World Missions: Mission expansion—\$125,000
3. Board for Ministerial Education: Martin Luther College student financial assistance—\$125,000
4. Board for World Missions: Mission support/expansion—\$100,000
5. Board for Home Missions: Mission support/expansion—\$100,000
6. Board for Ministerial Education: Top capital project priorities—\$150,000
7. Special Ministries: WELS Military Services Committee—\$50,000
8. Special Ministries: WELS Prison Ministry Committee—\$50,000
9. Ministry of Christian Giving: Additional Christian giving counselor—\$120,000

WELS Christian Aid and Relief

The work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, which provides a means for WELS members to assist in times of disaster and to provide support for humanitarian aid projects in our mission fields, is overseen by a commission with a pastor serving as chairman. There is a growing need for implementing training programs and procedures for rapid and effective response to disasters, work that requires more time and attention than a parish pastor can provide in his role as chairman. For that reason, at its November meeting the Synodical Council authorized the calling of a full-time director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. Pastor Daniel Sims accepted the call to serve in this position. He will begin to serve in his new calling in June 2020.

Some have asked whether this position required a man who is pastorally trained. The Synodical Council discussed this at length and determined that having a pastor serve in this role is vitally important for a number of reasons. While much of the work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief provides physical and financial assistance, the Synodical Council recognized that there is much more to this work. It is a ministry in which law and gospel will remain central. It is a ministry that will identify opportunities for mission outreach to people affected by disasters. It is a ministry that will provide training and encouragement to pastors and congregations; having someone who has served as the shepherd of a congregation will be valuable as he leads called workers and their congregations in this effort.

Pension Plan

In 2017 the Synodical Council appointed a special committee, chaired by Mr. Paul Holzhueter, to explore the question of whether WELS should change its retirement program from a defined benefit program (the current pension) to a defined contribution plan, similar to a 403(b) or 401(K). As a result of the committee's work, the Synodical Council is recommending that this change be made. Information was sent to all called workers earlier this year. The Synodical Council had planned to seek input from the district conventions in the summer of 2020, but due to COVID-19, the

district conventions were canceled. The Synodical Council will discuss how to move forward with this proposal at its meeting in November 2020.

Structure and calling process for the Pastoral Studies Institute

Several years ago, the Synodical Council authorized the formation of the International Operations Group to call one member of the Pastoral Studies Institute at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Recent changes in the make-up and activity of the Joint Mission Council allow it to have the responsibility for the calling of all Pastoral Studies Institute team members. Since Pastoral Studies Institute members are considered part of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty, the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Governing Board has agreed to share the calling responsibility of Pastoral Studies Institute members with the Joint Mission Council, in keeping with the usual calling process for seminary professors. The Synodical Council and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Governing Board have adopted this change. It also disbanded the International Operations Group, since its duties are now being carried out by the Joint Mission Council.

Capital Projects Committee

The Capital Project Committee, chaired by Synodical Council member Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, has worked to identify and prioritize all capital projects for the synodical schools and the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry so that proper planning can be carried out. This includes capital projects of upgrades, maintenance, and new projects. Each ministerial school campus has provided an updated master plan so that the committee can begin work on an overall prioritization of projects and possible funding mechanisms. Any project at a synodical school with a cost of more than \$100,000 requires the approval of the Synodical Council. The report of the Capital Projects Committee can be found on p. 49.

Chief financial officer succession search

Mr. Todd Poppe has announced his plans to retire from his position as WELS chief financial officer before the end of the year. A search committee was appointed late in 2019 and has been gathering resumes of qualified candidates. Interviews with those candidates have begun. The plan is to have a new chief financial officer in place before Poppe retires.

Appointments to the Synodical Council

Teacher Tom Plitzuweit has been appointed to the Synodical Council, replacing retiring Teacher James Moeller. Plitzuweit will complete the rest of Moeller's term and be eligible for election to a full term by the synod convention in 2021.

Thanks

Three members of the Synodical Council are completing their time of service this summer. Mr. Tim Snyder has served on the Synodical Council for 12 years as lay representative from the Southeastern Wisconsin District and is not eligible for re-election. Teacher James Moeller has served on the Synodical Council for 11 years as the teacher-at-large and is leaving due to retirement. Mr. Art Tessmann has served for 8 years and is not seeking re-election. We thank these men for their faithful work and pray for God's continued blessings on them and their families.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, reporter

Rev. Mark Schroeder, president and chairman
Mr. John Fowler, South Atlantic District
Mr. Kenneth Gosch, Dakota-Montana District
Mr. Steven Hansen, Arizona-California District
Rev. Paul Janke, chairman of WELS Board for World Missions
Rev. Joel Jenswold, pastor-at-large
Mr. Bradley Johnston, South Central District
Dr. Timothy Kriewall, Michigan District
Mr. Brent Masters, Pacific Northwest District
Teacher James Moeller, teacher-at-large
Dr. Ryan Olson, North Atlantic District
Mr. Dale Pohlman, Nebraska District
Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Mr. Kurt Sames, Minnesota District
Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, Northern Wisconsin District
Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, pastor-at-large

Mr. Timothy Snyder, Southeastern Wisconsin District
Mr. Art Tessmann, Western Wisconsin District
Rev. Donald Tollefson, Conference of Presidents
Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions
Rev. Charles Westra, Conference of Presidents
Rev. Joel Zank, Conference of Presidents

Advisory:

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions
Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services
Mr. Lee Hitter, director of communications
Rev. James Huebner, first vice president
Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving
Mr. Dennis Maurer, director of human resources
Mr. Todd J. Poppe, chief financial officer and treasurer
Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education
Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions
Mr. Martin Spriggs, chief technology officer
Rev. Joel Voss, second vice president (serves as the secretary of the Synodical Council)
Mr. Sean Young, director of WELS Missions Operations

Appendix 1: 2019 WELS convention compliance listing

Committee, Resolution	Responsible group	Resolution description	Due by:
Resolution 2-03	COP	2021 synod convention at Michigan Lutheran Seminary	<i>July 2021; planning begun</i>
Resolution 2-04	COP	Encouragement to publicize the staff ministry program and encourage congregations to consider calling a staff minister when expanding their ministry	<i>Ongoing</i>
Resolution 2-05	President	Forward the convention offering of \$5,038 to World Missions for the support of the Hmong Vietnam outreach effort	<i>Completed after convention</i>
Resolution 3-01	CICR	Declare formal fellowship with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya	<i>Completed at 2019 convention</i>
Resolution 3-02	CICR	Declare formal fellowship with the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church of Taiwan	<i>Completed at 2019 convention</i>
Resolution 5-01	SC	Unfunded priority list adopted; to be used as a guide for the SC if funding becomes available	<i>Ongoing</i>
Report 5-02	SC	SC is to clarify information regarding “Fair Market Value” as used in the salary matrix and to clarify how to implement cost of living adjustments after the first year of ministry	<i>Completed</i>
Resolution 6-01	SC	Ministry financial plan adopted; provides funding and spending plan for WELS ministries	<i>Ongoing</i>
Resolution 8-01	World Missions	Encourage congregations to contact WELS Missions Promotions to schedule mission Sundays; encourage congregations to make use of Mission Journeys program	<i>Ongoing</i>
Resolution 9-01	Ministerial Education; Ministry of Christian Giving; COP	Encourage support for MLC’s “Equipping Christian Witnesses” effort	<i>Ongoing</i>
Resolution 12-01	SC; Board for Ministerial Education; Ministry of Christian Giving	SC and BME give prioritization to funding the 21st-Century Principal cohort; congregations and individuals be encouraged to support the program; congregations be encouraged to publicize the 21st-Century Lutheran Principal initiative and teachers be encouraged to participate	<i>Ongoing</i>
Resolution 12-02	SC	Consider additional funding for the Commission on Lutheran Schools	<i>Under consideration in the current planning process</i>
Resolution 16-01	WELS Christian Aid and Relief	Encouragements to expand efforts	<i>Ongoing</i>
Resolutions 17-01 thru 17-17	President	Make approved changes to the synod’s bylaws and implement required changes	<i>Completed August 2019</i>

Appendix 2: WELS Long-Range Plan (Adopted 2017)

“Our Great Heritage” UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory.’ ” (Revelation 14:6-7a).

We exist to proclaim the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ. We affirm that only that gospel can create and sustain faith. Thus, spiritual results related to the growth of the Holy Christian Church in every nation, tribe, language, and people are completely in the hands of God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to accomplish the results that only he can work, and he has entrusted the means of grace to human beings as his messengers. We fear God, preaching and teaching the law. We give him glory, preaching and teaching the gospel. We do that as individuals and as congregations working together in a confessional Lutheran church body, that is, we carry out our gospel ministry together while standing squarely on all the truths of Scripture as expressed by the Lutheran Confessions. At all times and in all we do our focus is the cross of Christ Jesus.

“To Spread Its Light From Age To Age Shall Be Our Chief Endeavor” FOUNDATION FOR LONG-RANGE PLANNING—OUR PURPOSE

For the purposes of making it clear that we are an outreach organization, for planning and marshalling resources as good stewards of God’s blessings, and for encouraging unity in spirit, the leaders of our synod have noted the constitutional priorities articulated by recent synod conventions and have summarized the purpose of our work as a synod with this planning guide:

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to give all glory to God by upholding, defending, and proclaiming the truth of the Holy Scriptures as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions, and by providing a means for congregations and their members to extend the reach of their God-given mission of proclaiming the gospel in Word and sacrament through joint mission efforts at home and abroad, the training of called workers, and coordination of gospel applications to encourage spiritually healthy called workers in spiritually healthy congregations and schools.

“Through Life It Guides Our Way” THE PICTURE IN 2025

Under God’s blessing and by grace alone, we hope to see the following ambitious and realistic snapshot of our work in 2025.

Worldwide Identity as Confessional Lutherans

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 and the 175th anniversary of WELS in 2025, we are engaging Christian leaders around the world to join with confessional Lutherans in North America and beyond so that by 2025 the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) will be more widely known as a confessional Lutheran church body firmly founded on the Holy Scriptures and joyfully partnering to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ in Word and sacrament to as many people as possible around the globe.

What you will recognize

- WELS materials will present the gospel with remarkable clarity as an authentic voice of the confessional evangelical Lutheran church.

What may look new

- Existing Christian church bodies around the world will be training their pastors and other called workers with WELS materials and personnel in order to become authentic Lutherans.

World Missions

Recognizing the need for every soul to hear the gospel, by 2025 the Board for World Missions (BWM) will be working with all of the other areas of the synod to serve more than 1,000,000 souls worldwide (160,000 souls in 2016).

What you will recognize

- A world mission team that agrees on a scriptural Lutheran understanding of missiological terms and philosophy, using planning tools to keep the work focused on the one thing needful.
- Regional seminaries, national theological professors, functional Bible institutes, and regular on-site training from catechetical level on up supplemented by distance learning.
- Catechetical, Bible institute level, and seminary course materials in many languages.
- Expatriate missionaries increasingly in a training function.

What may look new

- The majority of missionaries, pastors, and other congregational leaders from the people groups themselves.
- Mission networks and mission support networks that transcend national boundaries.

Home Missions

Recognizing that sharing the gospel through the establishment of new gospel outposts in North America is the primary purpose of Home Missions, by 2025 the Board for Home Missions will continue to seek every opportunity to plant new ministries and to enhance gospel outreach in existing congregations in order to serve more than 300,000 communicant members and more than 400,000 baptized members in the United States (298,899 communicant members and 376,177 baptized members in 2016).

What you will recognize

- The goal of opening at least 10 new missions a year.
- Support for ministry enhancements in existing congregations.
- Coordinated support for all stages of ministry development, including repayment of building loans, with some congregations and programs achieving self-support every year.

What may look new

- Increased multi-site opportunities throughout mission fields.
- Increased flexibility in facility acquisitions (especially in high-cost areas), including the option to buy and renovate existing buildings.
- Self-supporting immigrant groups in urban areas with the majority of missionaries, pastors, and other leaders from the people groups themselves.
- Purposefully enhanced relationships with subsidiaries and parasynodicals in supporting mission opportunities.

Joint Mission Council

With the combined resources and coordination of Home and World Missions, working with Ministerial Education programs for training non-traditional workers, by 2025 the Joint Mission Council (JMC) will coordinate the networking of confessional Lutherans from at least a dozen people groups with which WELS members come into contact.

What you will recognize

- Regular meetings of leaders from people groups in our fellowship.

What may look new

- Just-in-time Lutheran training at the appropriate doctrinal level for any individual who wants to serve as a pastor, teacher, or missionary anywhere in the world, building on our current Pastoral Studies Institute program.
- Organizational structures that facilitate the new ministry.

Ministerial Education

Recognizing God's grace in the precious Lutheran heritage of proclaiming the unconditional gospel that has been passed to our generation, by 2025 the Board for Ministerial Education (BME) will be working with all of the other areas of synod to provide the right number of pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and missionaries so that annual vacancy levels remain under 10 percent (8 percent vacancy rate in 2016).

What you will recognize

- Graduates who are willing to serve anywhere that the church needs them, who believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, and who subscribe without reservation to the Lutheran Confessions.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), offering theological training that prepares men to enter the pastoral ministry of WELS or of churches within our confessional fellowship, and endeavoring to offer opportunity for theological and

- professional growth to called workers who already are serving in the ministry of our confessional fellowship.
- Martin Luther College (MLC), training a corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified to meet the ministry needs of WELS and who are competent to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord. These Christian witnesses include men ready for pastoral training at WLS; men and women ready for service as teachers and staff ministers in the synod's churches, schools, and other institutions; men and women ready for other church ministries, both full and part time, responding to the needs of WELS; international students preparing for ministry in partnership with WELS mission fields; and men and women in programs of continuing education that meet the ministerial needs of WELS.
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary, preparing high school students for the public ministry of the gospel, encouraging them to enroll at MLC.
- Luther Preparatory School, preparing and encouraging young men and women for the full-time ministry in WELS.

What may look new

- Declining rates of educational debt held by graduates of MLC.
- Comprehensive long-term plans to maintain and improve the physical plants of the ministerial education schools.
- Growing participation with partners in Home and World Missions to serve diverse ethnic populations in global ministry.
- Rapidly growing numbers of teachers in self-supporting Lutheran schools in major U.S. urban areas.
- More comprehensive training and certification of principals and early childhood directors.

Congregation and District Ministry

Recognizing the vital importance of congregational health, by 2025, under the direction of the Conference of Presidents (COP), Congregational Services (CS) will serve congregations and their leaders by providing resources, training, and personal assistance so that they might carry out gospel ministry in the most faithful way on the local level.

What you will recognize

- The Commission on Worship, helping parishes in their central activity of worship that glorifies God and strengthens his people.
- The Commission on Evangelism, assisting congregations and members to seize every opportunity the Lord provides for personal witnessing to evangelize lost souls.
- The Commission on Special Ministries, offering spiritual and practical guidance and training to congregations and individuals as they share God's love to those with needs or circumstances that prevent them from being served through the congregation's usual ministry.
- The Commission on Lutheran Schools, guiding and assisting congregations in advancing the gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening both elementary and secondary Lutheran schools as well as early childhood ministries.

What may look new

- A new printed hymnal and psalter completely supported by electronic worship planning resources.
- The activities of all of CS generated by the needs and priorities identified by the COP through Commission on Congregational Counseling contacts with congregations and considered requests from individuals and parasynodical organizations.
- Expanded activities of the Commission on Adult Discipleship and the Commission on Youth and Family Ministry under one director.
- An emphasis on reclaiming wandering sheep.

“Lord Grant While Worlds Endure We Keep Its Teachings Pure”

Resources

It is the stated goal of WELS leadership and the synod in convention to have Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) serve as the foundational source of financial support for synodical ministries. In order to carry out the plans and goals listed in this long-range plan, under God's blessing and by his grace alone, the Conference of Presidents (COP) will coordinate the work of circuit pastors, WELS Communication Services, and the WELS Ministry of Christian Giving to encourage CMO gifts as well as special gifts from individuals and groups for the general work of WELS and for specific gospel projects. The Synodical Council (SC) will coordinate the use of CMO, general gifts placed in previous years in the Financial Stabilization Fund, and specific gifts in each biennial ministry plan.

Resource allocation

The synod president will consult with the President's Advisory Council (PAC) to develop a biennial ministry plan for presentation to the Synodical Council and the synod convention. The ministry plan will reflect continuity in our work of proclaiming the gospel as well as considered decisions for dealing with new circumstances and opportunities as they arise.

Faithful use of resources for mission and ministry

The work of the synod takes place properly with a scriptural worldview of history. When the forces of Satan have conspired and risen up to attack God's church and the gospel itself, God has enabled faithful believers to stand firm. They listen to the Word, repent of their sin, return to the cross, and treasure the sweet news of full forgiveness in Jesus. They form visible churches to hold faithfully to the Word of God without compromise and then to proclaim the saving message of that pure Word to the world, throughout all generations.

Accounting Oversight Committee

Our calling

The Accounting Oversight Committee serves WELS and its 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 by assisting in ensuring that financial reports are prepared timely, accurately, and in compliance with generally accepted accounting principles. 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 schools, subsidiaries and affiliate boards, commissions, and committees are informed through WELS' chief financial officer.

Our current situation

In 2016, the Financial Accounting Standards Board issued new rules for not-for-profit financial reporting. The changes include reporting net assets with and without donor restrictions (versus unrestricted, temporarily restricted, and permanently restricted), addition of a statement of program expenses by natural classification, adding quantitative and qualitative disclosure on liquidity, and removing the charge to net assets without donor restrictions for underwater endowments. WELS successfully implemented these changes for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019.

The Accounting Oversight Committee engaged the independent audit firm of Baker Tilly, LLC, to conduct the annual audits of the consolidated financial statements of WELS, its schools, and its Support Services subsidiaries for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019. All audits were completed within four months of year end, and all entities received an unmodified opinion—the best you can get—on the financial statements' compliance with generally accepted accounting principles. In addition, the auditors did not identify any significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal controls. Copies of the annual financial statements, quarterly consolidated financial statements, and quarterly budget reports are available on WELS Financial Services' site at <https://wels365.sharepoint.com/sites/finance/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

In addition to the annual WELS financial statement audits, the AOC also engaged Baker Tilly, LLC, to audit the WELS VEBA Group Health Plan and WELS Pension Plan for calendar year 2019. These financial statements also received unmodified opinions for 2019, and the auditors did not identify any significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in internal controls.

The Accounting Oversight Committee deliberated whether or not to recommend that a financial statement audit be performed on the Shepherd Plan for calendar year 2019. This plan is not subject to ERISA, so an audit is not required. A review of the controls with the assistance of Baker Tilly, the plan advisor and third-party administrator, noted that the control environment was strong and steps have been taken to inform participating entities of their responsibilities. As a result, the Accounting Oversight Committee felt that the cost of an audit was not warranted.

A look ahead

Mr. Todd Poppe has announced his plans to retire from his position as WELS chief financial officer before the end of the year. A search for his replacement is being conducted by President Mark Schroeder with the input of the Synodical Council Executive Committee and this committee. Poppe has expressed his willingness to stay on in a volunteer capacity after this date to ensure a smooth transition.

The new accounting pronouncements on accounting for grants, revenues, leases, and credit losses will need to be implemented in the years ahead. WELS is working on preparation for implementation.

During the biennium, the Accounting Oversight Committee will work with the new chief financial officer on acclimation to WELS financial reporting and control environment as well as monitoring WELS risk management and insurance programs.

Mr. Bill Schultz, reporter

Mr. Bill Schultz, chairman

Mr. Todd Backus

Mr. Jeff Fisher

Mr. Jim Freer

Mr. Daniel Riebe

Mr. Gary Schmid

Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, Synodical Council liaison

Advisory:

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, chief financial officer and treasurer

WELS Archives

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

Currently the archives is blessed with five volunteers who come in on a regular basis to help process and organize collections. Work is being completed on three church collections and materials we have in the archives relating to world missions. A full index has been completed on the Early Presidential Letters Collection with the next step being to translate Koehler's index of these letters to compare it to our index to make sure nothing is missing.

The archivist and volunteers continue to add material to the online catalog ArchivesSpace. By June 2019 the Wisconsin Lutheran College student intern was able to add five collections to the catalog, including the Northwestern College Collection, which is one of the largest single collections in the archives. Since then, more work has been done to complete information for existing collections in this catalog. Currently, 42 collections in ArchivesSpace are accessible from any computer. Having more collection information available online has led to an increase in research requests. In 2019 more than 175 research requests were received via phone and e-mail and 33 in-person research appointments were conducted. 2020 has started with 22 research requests and 5 in-person research appointments as of March.

Outreach for the archives has continued over the last year. The archivist attended the 2019 Mission and Ministry conference at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in February; the 2019 Lutheran Women's Missionary Society National Convention in Des Moines, Iowa, in June; and the 2019 synod convention in New Ulm, Minn., in August. In 2020 the

archivist had an outreach table at the Lutheran Leadership Conference held in Chicago, Ill., in January and the Mission and Ministry conference held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in February. Other outreach opportunities have included being a guest speaker at OWLS luncheons and for retired pastors' groups. 2019 saw more than 1,000 visitors come through the Visitors Center at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. These tours provide a chance for visitors to see the archives and chat with them about the ways in which the archives helps support our congregations and ministry, as well as provide the archivist with a chance to educate visitors on what materials their congregations should be saving.

Digitization of materials continues as requests come in. Currently, the major digitization project is the scanning of the synod convention *Proceedings*. Digital copies of these only went back to 1997, so at the end of February the decision was made to prioritize the scanning of all convention *Proceedings* that are in English. The scans are keyword searchable and will be useful for a variety of research projects as well as for internal use within the many departments of synod administration. The digitization of other collections continues on an "as requested" basis. When requests for materials from a certain collection are made, digital copies are made and preserved. This has helped grow the digital collection for many collections but especially the Early Presidential Letters Collection.

The archivist also had the opportunity for professional development over the course of 2019. In May, the archivist was invited to be a panelist at the Bethany Lutheran College Conference on Archives in Academics. This conference was aimed at how archivists and academic professionals can make resources available and assist students by helping to engage them in historical research. In November, the archivist attended the Lutheran Historical Conference Archivists and Historians meeting at Concordia Lutheran Seminary. Here Lutheran historians and archivists from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and WELS met together to discuss the state of Lutheran history and how we can further advance the study of Lutheran history. This was a great opportunity to come together with Lutheran historical professionals and learn how we can work together to advance the knowledge of all our synods' histories.

A look ahead

Work in the archives will continue much the same as it has the past year. With the help of volunteers, collections will continue to be processed, organized, and cataloged. The synod convention *Proceedings* will continue to be scanned and made available to researchers. It is still the goal of the archivist that *Forward in Christ* and *Northwestern Lutheran* collections are a high priority for digitization to be an English counterpart to the scanning of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*. Other collections will have items made available in digital form as they are requested.

Outreach for the archives will continue through 2020. In partnership with the WELS Historical Institute, items from our synod archives are being featured on the WELS Historical Institute Facebook page, which is helping to spread the word about the resources available in the archives. This partnership will continue and help bring more awareness of both organizations to people across our synod through social media.

2020 promises to be another year of record number of research requests, especially as more material becomes available digitally and more collections are added to the online catalog. Several collections have been identified for priority cataloging in 2020 including the Board for Ministerial Education Collection, the Board for World Missions Collection, and collections from various districts within the synod. In 2019 the archives had a year of blessings and flourished by God's grace, and we humbly ask that he continue to bless the work and efforts of the archivist and many volunteers.

For more information, contact Mrs. Susan Willems, WELS archivist, at 414-256-3203 or susan.willems@wels.net.

Mrs. Susan Willems, reporter

WELS Christian Aid and Relief

Our calling

WELS Christian Aid and Relief serves as our synod's "ministry of compassion," bringing physical relief to victims of natural disasters in the form of cash grants, food, clothing, and medical supplies. Christian Aid and Relief also partners with WELS missionaries to support humanitarian aid projects to help develop relationships to proclaim the gospel. The mission of Christian Aid and Relief is drawn from the scriptural encouragement, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). Because of all that Christ has done for us, we are eager to reflect Christ's love and compassion to those in need. We seek to personalize our efforts by conducting careful assessments and distributing our funds first through our churches and then through other trusted secular agencies. We bring in volunteers when requested to assist in recovery efforts.

Our current situation

Christian Aid and Relief is not funded in the WELS budget but by the special gifts of WELS members.

From Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2019, our expenditures for domestic and foreign disaster relief and financial grants for called workers and members suffering from extreme medical and financial burdens were \$760,492.

In addition, \$466,212 was designated for Humanitarian Aid projects for fiscal year 2019–20, which assisted our world missionaries in building relationships to proclaim the gospel.

Disaster relief

Christian Aid and Relief provided disaster relief in a variety of situations including a grant to a congregation whose church was destroyed by a fire and tornado relief in South Dakota. Hurricane relief was a major focus of our efforts this past year with expenses totaling \$489,843.

Bahamas

Hurricane Dorian swept over the Bahamas, ravaged the islands, and did extreme damage to the infrastructure. When WELS Christian Aid and Relief is not able to send volunteers into an area or there are no missionaries or pastors in the area to disperse aid or relief, we partner with Direct Relief, a secular relief organization. Our gifts were used to help support 27 shipments of more than 143 pallets of emergency medicines and medical supplies to local clinics, shelters, and hospitals.

Panama City, Fla.

Several volunteers attended the dedication service for Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla. Local news coverage told the story of the volunteers offering their time and talents to help those in need. More than 300 volunteers, including 40 students from Martin Luther College, assisted with repairs to the church, parsonage, member homes, and homes in the community. In March Christian Aid and Relief brought in additional volunteers to drywall a member's home.

Coronavirus

Christian Aid and Relief sent masks and financial assistance to South Asia for our brothers and sisters dealing with the coronavirus. Christians there also distributed masks and supplies to people in the community as part of an outreach effort. Assessment of financial needs related to the coronavirus is ongoing.

Humanitarian aid

Christian Aid and Relief continues to work with WELS Board for World Missions, WELS Board for Home Missions, WELS missionaries, and our sister congregations of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference around the world in funding humanitarian aid projects. Below is a list of projects approved for 2019–20, totaling \$466,212.

Ethiopia

Funds have been granted to provide a borehole for clean drinking water to a community in Ethiopia. The borehole will serve as a gathering point for community members that they might feel welcome at the church; get to know the pastor/health educators/members; and become interested in worship, classes, and other church events.

Malawi

The Central Africa Medical Mission in Malawi receives funding from Christian Aid and Relief for medications and nutritional supplements. The Central Africa Medical Mission currently provides medical care at four clinics, which also serve as Lutheran Church of Central Africa churches. These humanitarian efforts help serve as a bridge for proclaiming the gospel as the workers communicate Christ's love and as they care for the physical needs of others. Funds have also been granted to provide new boreholes and repair or re-drill current boreholes in Malawi so people around numerous villages can receive clean water. Each pastor and congregation sees a new borehole as meeting a physical need and as a bridge to the gospel.

Nigeria

Funds have been granted to Nigeria to help provide medical assistance for people in great need, especially for the unchurched in the local villages. These efforts help demonstrate the loving care of Lutheran Christians. Aid will provide support for church members to visit widows; assist orphans with school needs; and help the blind, crippled, and aged who lack physical support. The ability to offer care and provide humanitarian aid to Nigeria's unchurched will serve as a bridge for Christ the King and All Saints Lutheran Churches of Nigeria to invite villagers to church to hear the gospel.

Zambia

The Central Africa Medical Mission in Zambia is receiving funding for medications, clinic renovation, and medical supplies that help support the mission of communicating Christ's love and sharing caring concern for the physical needs of others at the Lutheran Rural Mission Health Centre.

Indonesia

Funding has been granted to assist congregations in Indonesia in handing out staple food items to needy households in their neighborhoods. The hope and prayer is that such caring and sharing will provide a bridge with these people by letting them know the location of the source of the aid and by strengthening the churches' communication and harmony with the local community.

Thailand

We continue to support the efforts of medically trained volunteers who travel to Thailand to set up week-long medical clinics in the village churches. As these clinics draw people from both local and neighboring villages, they provide the missionaries and other workers with a unique bridge for presenting the gospel and for creating a goodwill presence for our churches through such care and service. These efforts include vacation Bible school and English as a foreign language classes as well as follow-up contacts after the classes conclude. Similar efforts in recent years have been blessed with the fruits of these labors including baptisms, church membership, and the support of village leaders.

Bulgaria

Funding has been granted to provide medicine and packages with food products, along with Christian books and brochures for visitors to major festival worship services (Christmas and Easter). With the Lord's blessing this will help build bridges to share the gospel with more people and to maintain connections for ongoing ministry contact.

Russia

Funding has been granted to Russia to provide food, clothing, coal for winter, hygiene items, school supplies, and medicine for the needy. These gifts will allow for the law-gospel pamphlets to be distributed and to invite people to Bible instruction classes. This will let the workers' light shine in the area and grow their reputation of helping those in need. Aid has also been granted to assist institutions such as emergency social services, children's shelters, house of invalids and veterans, and employment agencies. The government values this work and presence, which is very important as it helps keep our doors open for Bible classes, Christian counseling, and distribution of Christian literature and books. These efforts provide additional connections to the local congregations as they reach out to the villages.

Ukraine

Funding has been granted to provide food assistance for needy refugees and orphans who have been forced to leave their homes. Additional support in the form of heating fuel helps needy families, especially unchurched in the villages, who cannot heat their homes in the cold seasons of the year. This assistance, which is provided at churches, serves as a good Christian witness to many people and shows the love of God to many in great need. Some funding has also been approved to provide help to the very poor in the form of bus transportation to be able to attend outreach activities. This provides additional opportunities to share the love of God to those who join in worship, Bible studies,

and Sunday school. Christian love is also shared through a project to provide food and clothes to mothers and their needy children at church activities.

Albania

Christian Aid and Relief provides funding for Christmas and Easter food baskets for needy individuals in their congregation and in their neighborhoods. Invitations and information about the congregation are shared with the recipients of the baskets, including a New Testament.

Haiti

Christian Aid and Relief approved funding to help equip some orphanages with sewing machines at a community center at which people will receive training and time on sewing machines. Such neighborhood participation at the institute will provide many opportunities for proclaiming the gospel in the community.

Mexico

Christian Aid and Relief provides funding for a transportation and soup kitchen ministry. People come in contact with the church through the Friday soup kitchen, and many of them then begin to join in worship on Sundays.

South Asia

Funding was provided to locations in South Asia to provide medical equipment such as blood pressure cuffs, thermometers, hospital beds, baby warmers, and glaucoma tests for hospitals. Funds have also been granted for a reverse osmosis plant and some borehole hand pumps to provide fresh water for thousands of people.

Some funding supports health clinics, where workers minister to the physical and spiritual needs of those who receive care. Aid is provided to reach out to women in rural and remote areas to offer sewing and knitting classes so they can help provide for their families, especially since their husbands are often working in other countries. Aid also provides textbooks and other educational needs for higher secondary level students. This opens doors to train future leaders and teachers. Funds have also been granted to provide mosquito nets for victims of local flooding. These nets will protect people from mosquito-borne illnesses and even from snake bites. Some funding supports sharing good news through technology and computer labs. Aid in the form of food and warm clothes is provided to widows and orphans, who are often treated unfairly and may even struggle to survive. Other funding will provide smokeless metal stoves for many villagers who suffer from severe respiratory problems due to wood fires in homes. This project helps to gain the goodwill of the people in the community. Aid will also provide nutrition packs for mothers and newborn babies, who must leave their homes for nearly two weeks after giving birth. These new mothers will gather to learn how to care for themselves and their baby and to receive much-needed comfort. Aid supports workshops provided to farmers who learn how to provide food and income for their families through off-season farming methods.

Funding has been granted to assist school children with education costs, including uniforms, books, and supplies so that these young people can be built up to become future leaders. Funds were also approved to provide medical care for many families and assist with crippling debt. Funding has also been granted to train women in basic skills like knitting, stitching, and embroidery. By learning these skills, women can then support themselves and be spared ill treatment in the public marketplace and work safely from home to receive income to support their families. Funding has been provided to help toward the cost of medical procedures needed by many families without the means to pay. Aid has also been granted for food distribution selected times during the year.

Las Vegas, Nev.

In the Las Vegas area funding has been granted to assist in African refugee/immigrant outreach through The Joseph Project. As new African immigrants arrive in this area, congregation members can welcome them, provide a welcome gift (cooking pots, dinnerware, toiletries), assist them in getting settled into the community and transition to life in America, using this opportunity to proclaim to them the gospel of Jesus through personal witness, worship services and Bible classes, children's Bible programs, food pantry/Bible study ministry, and personal follow-up.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Funds have been granted to Hope Lutheran Church in Toronto, Ontario, as they provide a Welcome Project. This project enables the congregation to provide valuable humanitarian assistance to newcomers to their area. The assistance can take the form of food, transportation costs, or medical help, all of which assist immigrants' transition into the area.

Texas

Several community efforts have received funding that assists congregations in providing backpacks filled with school

supplies for neighborhood children. Another project provides meals for low-income seniors. This has helped establish relationships with these residents resulting in church visitation and Bible study attendance. These efforts assist in building relationships with area families and provide opportunities to share the gospel.

Colorado

Funds were granted to assist a congregation with a school supply drive to help families in their community that struggle to meet the expenses of school start up. The school supply giveaway established and strengthened connections with local families and built a positive impression of the church, whose ultimate goal is to share the good news of Jesus with their diverse community.

General relief grants

WELS Christian Aid and Relief also provides grants to people in our congregations and mission fields dealing with catastrophic personal and medical difficulties. Our goal is to encourage and assist the efforts of our local congregations.

A look ahead

Annually, Christian Aid and Relief reviews humanitarian aid grant requests forwarded to it from the Board for World Missions and the Board for Home Missions. We look forward to working with our new director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, Pastor Dan Sims, who accepted his call from the Synodical Council. He will begin his work among us in June 2020. As we enhance our disaster relief ministry, our action plans include the following:

- Communicate to WELS membership our plans to enhance our disaster relief ministry.
- Develop a written disaster training manual.
- Develop materials to promote a ministry of compassion among our WELS congregations.
- Develop disaster relief training meetings for congregations.
- Train and equip district coordinators and WELS members to prepare for, assess, and oversee local disaster response.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief continues to look for ways to improve its communication to WELS members. We want congregations to know we are available to assist them in their local efforts to help members facing an extreme medical or financial crisis or to reach out to assist their community in a time of disaster. *Lifeline* videos have been developed so that those who support our work can see firsthand how their gifts are being used. Our Web page, wels.net/relief, continues to offer timely information and a convenient way to donate online for Christian Aid and Relief projects or to volunteer for our recovery efforts. Members can also find us on Facebook at "Christian Aid and Relief." Committee members and volunteers make presentations to various groups to "tell our stories," letting WELS members know about the opportunities to help people through Christian Aid and Relief. DVDs of *Lifeline* videos and other written materials and photos are also available upon request.

Thanks

We thank the Lord for moving the hearts of WELS members to show how much they care with their prayers and gifts of love. We also thank our volunteers who donated their time and talents to our relief efforts.

We thank Staff Minister Tom Hering for his faithful service to our commission for the past 12 years, especially serving as secretary and leading us through our annual review of humanitarian aid projects.

Rev. Robert Hein, reporter

Rev. Robert Hein, chairman

Staff Minister Tom Hering, secretary

Rev. Bruce Marggraf

Mr. Dennis Palmberg

Rev. Richard Warnecke

Advisory:

Mrs. Beth Zambo, administrative assistant

Support Services

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

Technology

Our calling

WELS Technology exists to support the work of the synod by providing a capable and secure technical infrastructure, facilitating digital communications, enabling congregations and called workers to make the best use of technology, and coordinating technology initiatives that can't be done at smaller organizational levels. Together the dedicated men and women that make up the WELS Technology team seek to help the spread of the gospel with technology tools the Lord continues to make available in the 21st century.

WELS technology divides its work into 3 areas—Administration and Project Management, Information Services, and Application Services—that are responsible for 10 distinct services: 1) IT administration, 2) workstations and peripherals, 3) project management, 4) disaster recovery, 5) servers and storage, 6) documentation and training, 7) end-user support, 8) network and telephony, 9) application and web development, and 10) application and web maintenance.

One of the challenges of providing the appropriate technology to meet ministry needs is determining the best choice among many that are both cost effective and future-proof. It is difficult to predict if a technology chosen today will be obsolete or even “gone” tomorrow. Strategic planning is essential to being good stewards and to still meet changing needs.

It should come as no surprise that security and privacy demand much of our attention. While appropriate steps have always been taken to keep the synod's digital assets secure, they are at even greater risk today given the current climate and prevalence of hacking, phishing, ransomware, and identity theft. More and more time and budget are spent in securing the data entrusted to the synod by churches, schools, called workers, volunteers, and donors.

Our primary calling is connecting gospel-sharers with the available technologies that can assist in the spread of that gospel. As a result, time and resources are set aside to help with the process of making technologies available to those who would like to share the good news by any means possible. Our calling is to find those intersections between technology and ministry.

Our current situation

This year WELS Technology decommissioned the longstanding synod database called “Progress.” For almost 30 years Progress maintained information on churches, schools, called workers, donors, pension, and other key data. This multi-year project migrated the data to a more modern Microsoft-based platform. Users now maintain that data through web-based interfaces that can be loaded from any browser at any location. The decision to use web technologies was part of the synod's overall disaster recovery (DR) planning process. It is important to plan for times when synod employees cannot physically come to the office. We are also seeing more and more employees work virtually. This saves on commuting time and costs and provides a broader candidate pool for positions during the hiring process. Enterprise-grade security measures were applied throughout the project to insure that regardless of how a user accesses the system the data is transmitted via secure protocols and encrypted when stored in databases.

Other work continues to safeguard the synod's digital assets, as well as comply with national and international security and privacy laws. A full security audit is completed each year to ensure that websites that provide

e-commerce functionality are secure, and appropriate policies and procedures are in place and in compliance with Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards. A relatively new compliance concern is the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) by the European Union. Gaps were identified and have now been addressed. Remote device management and disk encryption were put in place to safeguard data. More frequent and aggressive attacks on our systems have been observed but no violations to date. Security audits will continue and also be coordinated with other synod institutions, especially our four synod schools, subsidiaries (Church Extension Fund, WELS Investment Funds, WELS Foundation, Northwestern Publishing House), and affiliate (WELS VEBA). For those with WELS Cloud logins, an abundance of security and privacy resources exist at <https://cloud.wels.net/security>. Watch the synod's technology page for articles related to security and privacy as well at <https://technology.welsrc.net>.

Recently the technology directors and key staff from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and Northwestern Publishing House were invited to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry to discuss security and privacy best practices. Planning is underway for more coordination among these units and the WELS Technology team to take even greater steps toward securing and protecting data and the privacy of the people we each serve. One key takeaway from the meetings was the importance of a regular and complete risk management regimen.

In related security projects, a "WELS-Safe" form was launched to allow users to securely send sensitive data to the synod office. Using this form, information like credit card and social security numbers, and sensitive data contained in documents can be attached to the form and securely delivered to select synod departments. These forms alleviate the need to use insecure e-mail methods to send this information. Once the data is received it is then securely deleted.

Last summer a text messaging, or SMS (Short Message Service), tool was created to allow emergency notifications to be sent to Center for Mission and Ministry employees' cell phones. This service will ensure that all workers will have timely information in the event of a disaster, facility emergency, or other imminent threat. Annual safety meetings are conducted to train and educate workers on all emergency protocols. During the COVID-19 outbreak, most workers were able to successfully access necessary resources and tools from their home offices. This allowed the Center for Mission and Ministry to stay open virtually with little impact to services provided or ministries carried out.

This past winter a WELS Retirement Program Comparison Calculator was built to help pension plan participants understand the impact of the proposed changes to the plan. The calculator provides a comparison between the current pension plan and a freeze of that plan and rollout of a defined contribution plan. Simply enter basic information about your situation (birthdate, years of creditable service, anticipated retirement age, and expected return rate) and the tool will give you detailed information on how the new plan will affect you. The calculator is available at <https://wels-pension-calculator.web.app>.

Recently several improvements have been made to the online yearbook, <https://yearbook.wels.net>. District, conference, and circuit information has been added for each organization and person. Visiting a single record will show the "DCC" information. You can also view all districts and their associated conferences and circuits by clicking the "WELS Districts, Conferences, and Circuits" link on the home page. A login function has also been added that will allow certain Center for Mission and Ministry and district staff to copy e-mail addresses of organizations or people by DCC to the clipboard for easy e-mailing or download all data via a CSV file.

Over the past year, several new websites or subsites were either launched or enhanced. The most visible example is the recently released *Forward in Christ* magazine site, <https://forwardinchrist.net>. *Forward in Christ* is the synod's official magazine. WELS Technology worked closely with staff from Northwestern Publishing House and WELS Communication Services to build this new site to meet the needs of readers of all ages. A new search utility allows a full text search of PDF versions of the last five years of *Forward in Christ* issues.

WELSTech, a weekly audio/video podcast about technology and ministry, has published more than 625 episodes. The podcast continues each week with guest interviews, tech-in-ministry topics, tips and tools, and great feedback from the show listeners. The show addresses timely topics, and as of this writing recently released a podcast devoted to ways online or digital ministries can help us get through the challenges of COVID-19. To listen or view the show, visit the show notes page for the podcast at <http://welstech.wels.net>.

In 2019–20 more than 40 new digital forms were created that assist synod workers, called workers, and other WELS members provide information to the synod or request services. More than a dozen applications were also built that assist areas of ministry and subsidiaries or affiliates like the Benefit Plans Office be more productive and provide

the synod with important ministry services and tools. The dedicated men and women of WELS Technology spend countless hours on these projects working closely with each area of ministry. This collaboration makes it possible to produce high-quality digital products that benefit the entire synod. Information about past, current, and future WELS Technology projects is available in real time at <https://cloud.wels.net/techprojects>. Please visit to see the incredible quantity of work completed, and keep these workers in your prayers as they seek to serve you.

A look ahead

In the coming year WELS Technology will continue to work on your behalf in a number of areas of focus: 1) Continue work on WELSource, the synod's primary database and associated digital forms; 2) Continue work in hardening our security practices and infrastructure, while providing guidance to churches and schools on the same; 3) Focus on mobile-friendly ministry products and upgrades to apps like the WELS App (<https://wels.app>); and 4) Transition from under-utilized, legacy, and cost-ineffective digital tools to cheaper and more appropriate technologies.

The WELSource project will continue to move forward. Most work will be related to applications that manage data for called workers including basic biographic data including self-assessments and performance assessments, yearbook improvements, among others. Alongside the WELSource project will continue the steady migration of paper to digital forms. These efforts together will save thousands of man hours each year in data entry and management. Many of these improvements will benefit called workers, churches, and schools as they have greater visibility into synod data that affects them and allows an easy way to keep that data up-to-date. Call lists will be more accurate, reports timelier, and access to the right forms and people more likely without assistance.

Security, resource availability, and disaster recovery will again be a priority in the year ahead. It is a goal to provide continuing services to synod workers by making available virtual resources that can be accessed from any computer or device. This will also require even better security of portable computing equipment (laptops, tablets, and phones). In addition, a comprehensive Security Awareness program will be launched to ensure that all synod workers understand the importance of protecting synod data and a better awareness of some of the tactics hackers use.

The WELS App, <https://wels.app>, is used by thousands of people each day to read or listen to devotions, Bible readings, news, and synod reports. Plans are in place to offer even more spiritual content, notifications through text messaging, and ways to personalize the experience using the app.

Finally, work will continue on removing older, cost-ineffective, and under-utilized tools that are currently in use to serve forms and build applications. Once the work is done significant savings should be realized. The current strategy is to replace these forms and applications using mainstream platforms but using "build systems" that enable more flexibility and sustainability without relying on third-party products.

The WELS Technology team looks forward to opportunities for service. As God has allowed new technologies available for our use, we strive to be good stewards of them and enable our synod's ministries to use them to spread the precious news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. To him be the glory.

Mr. Martin Spriggs, reporter

Financial Services

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 provides financial planning and forecasts; accounting, audit, and financial statement preparation; gift processing; accounts payable; accounts receivable; unclaimed property; special funds accounting; payroll; risk

management; insurance; records retention; banking; cash management; investments; contract review; corporate credit card and rental vehicle programs; trust administration; tax advisory services; and legal services coordination. These services are provided to WELS, WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF), WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds (WIF), WELS Retirement Plans, WELS Voluntary Employee Benefits Association (VEBA) as well as serving as consultants for these services to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) and WELS' four ministerial education schools.

Human Resources and Facility Services also report to the chief financial officer (CFO). The CFO is the WELS treasurer and an advisor to the Synodical Council and Board for Ministerial Education as well as the Accounting Oversight and Compensation Review Committees. In addition, the CFO serves on the Capital Project Committee and as an ex officio member of the board of directors of Northwestern Publishing, WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, and WELS Investment Funds, and the WELS Retirement Plans and VEBA Commissions.

Our current situation

Financial Services is blessed with a dedicated, talented staff with complementary education, training, and work experiences. Financial Services will continue to identify, investigate, and implement strategies that improve effectiveness and reduce costs within the area and across WELS.

In 2019–20, Financial Services is working to implement cost-saving strategies identified in 2018–19 while meeting service expectations. Recently, the following occurred:

- Acclimation of employees with new responsibilities.
- Completed all audits within four months of year end, and the auditor's opinions were unmodified (the best possible).
- Implemented digital receipts for WELS' corporate credit card program.
- Implemented new accounting standards for not-for profit organizations that include renaming of net asset categories, reporting program expenses by natural classification, quantitative and qualitative disclosures on liquidity, and elimination of charging under water endowment balance to net assets without donor restrictions.
- Monitoring the support forecast and ministry financial plans for the 2019–21 biennium in challenging economic times.
- Developed planning assumptions, preliminary support forecast, and synod support allocations for the 2021–23 biennium ministry financial plan.
- Worked with the Capital Projects Committee and Synodical Council to clarify reporting and review of capital project plan modifications.

A look ahead

Even with significantly fewer staff than several years ago, Financial Services is focusing on maintaining day-to-day operations, reducing costs, and improving effectiveness. We are confident that controls will not be weakened and are fully committed to ensuring that services will not deteriorate because of the staff reduction. However, our abilities to react to new service requests may be limited. We will continue to seek out and implement changes that reduce costs, increase effectiveness, and/or strengthen internal controls.

Looking ahead, our plans include the following:

- Continue to implement new and additional features of cloud-based donor relationship management and accounting software.
- Collaborate with the ministerial education schools on investigation of paperless accounts payable processing alternatives.
- Implement the WorldAware travel monitoring and reporting solution to ensure those working and traveling abroad remain safe in ever-changing environments.
- Complete the analysis of the federal tax status of female called workers.
- Implementation of new accounting standards related to leases, revenue recognition, and contributions.
- On-boarding of new chief financial officer.
- Cross training of employees to ensure service continuity during vacancies and extended absences.

In summary, 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. Todd J. Poppe, reporter

Human Resources

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 advice 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 full-time employees—the human resources director and a human resources generalist. Beyond day-to-day human resource management activities, a few key initiatives include:

- Staffed the following key lay worker positions over the last year: marketing coordinator; assistant director, Missions Operations; technical support specialist; Commission on Lutheran Schools administrative specialist.
- Key staffing search underway at time of publication to find successor to fill the WELS chief financial officer position to replace Mr. Todd Poppe, retiring after 15+ years of dedicated service.
- Compensation Review: Human Resources continues to work with the Compensation Review Committee of the Synodical Council on review of the WELS Called Worker Compensation Guidelines. The Called Worker Compensation Calculator has been well received as a useful resource to calling bodies for both budget purposes and to assist in the calling process.
- 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.
- Synod board/committee nominee vetting: Human Resources assists in the process of filling board/committee openings for positions appointed by the Synodical Council, mainly with vetting of nominees to establish willingness to serve, procuring resume and/or bio forms, and creation of a central database to maintain all nominee data and vacancy records.
- Religious Worker Visas (R1): HR facilitates the process of securing Religious Worker Visas to assist Lutheran high schools with placement of Martin Luther College international student graduates in teaching positions within the United States.
- HR continues to work with congregations and members of the Conference of Presidents on matters related to risk and personnel as well as general compensation, benefit, and policy issues.

A look ahead

The key area of focus for the HR 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:

- Develop compensation guidelines, matrices, and models for the 2021–23 biennium.
- Facilitate learning and development programs for the management and staff of the synod entities.
- 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.
- Perform due diligence on the vendors and systems in place within the HR structure. This will be an important step to ensure both the outcomes provided, as well as the cost, are appropriate and expected.

- Work with our areas of ministry and synodical schools in coordinating timely information and support for workers.
- Provide continued training with synod leaders to continue to reinforce and develop the supervisory skills required.
- Work with the Synodical Council's designated committee(s) in reviewing and evaluating HR policies and procedures and compensation programs at our synod-operated organizations.
- 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. 61-63.

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

Mr. Dennis Maurer, reporter

Facility Services

Our calling

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

Our current situation

In spring 2014, synod administration moved to its new home in Waukesha, Wis., along I-94 on Stone Ridge Drive. The building is called the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry and has 33,000 square feet of space on two floors as well as a lower level, which is home to Northwestern Publishing House and the synod archives, with about 16,000 square feet of space.

A look ahead

The Synodical Council created a Building Fund policy 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. The balance in the building fund is approximately \$350,000. Although the building is fairly new in some respects, the parking lot and building systems, like HVAC, are starting to show their age and may need to be replaced in the next three to five years.

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, reporter

Capital Projects Committee

Our calling

By resolution, the 2013 synod convention created the Capital Projects Committee to ensure that the synod's capital needs, both for the maintenance of and new or improved facilities, were a component of the synod's ministry plans in the near term and longer term.

Our current situation

The Capital Projects Committee has been blessed with an unprecedented spirit of cooperation and collaboration. Praise God for blessing this collaborative planning effort.

The committee believes that the synod's facilities are generally well maintained and updated when funds are available. Through a use of operating funds, reserves, synod support, distributions from the ministerial education building endowment fund, and gifts, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, and Luther Preparatory School can adequately keep up on normal maintenance projects and modernization of their facilities and grounds. Michigan Lutheran Seminary has limited reserves and thus relies primarily on distributions from the ministerial education building endowment fund and gifts from the MLS Foundation for its facility maintenance and modernization needs. Collectively, these sources have proven to be adequate for the maintenance of the ministerial education facilities and grounds. The WELS Center for Mission and Ministry facility needs are funded from its Building Fund. The Center for Mission and Ministry Building Fund is funded by subsidiary and affiliate rent for space at the Center for Mission and Ministry and is adequately funded for the foreseeable future.

The Capital Projects Committee has worked closely with Martin Luther College on the scope and plan for two facility projects—a new student residence hall and turf athletic facility—that are included as the third pillar of the “Equipping Christian Witnesses” campaign. As funding becomes available, the committee will provide guidance and assistance with the commissioning of the projects.

A look ahead

Looking forward, the Capital Projects Committee, the Synodical Council, and the school governing boards have concerns about WELS' longer-term ability to maintain and modernize the facilities and grounds at its schools. These concerns are predicated on a funding model that relies heavily on Congregation Mission Offerings, which have slightly declined during the last decade while operating costs such as wages, benefits, utilities, and insurances have continued to rise.

For the 2019–21 biennium, the following is the total planned spending on capital maintenance for multiple projects costing less than \$100,000.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: \$534,000
Martin Luther College: \$1,361,000
Luther Preparatory School: \$238,000
Michigan Lutheran Seminary: \$234,000

In addition to the above maintenance projects for the biennium, the following projects costing more than \$100,000 are planned.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

FY20: Inner court landscape project
FY20: Administration building bathroom remodeling
FY21: New faculty residence

Martin Luther College

FY19 & FY20: Centennial Hall heating
FY20 & FY21: HVAC control system upgrades
FY21: Turfed recreation facility
FY21: New student residence hall

Luther Preparatory School

FY20: Augsburg Hall roof replacement
FY21 & FY22: Wartburg Hall window replacement
FY21: Conceptual drawings for a new music auditorium
FY21: Replace gymnasium bleachers

Michigan Lutheran Seminary

FY20: Replace athletic field bleachers and construct press box

Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, reporter

Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, chairman and Synodical Council lay representative

Mr. Matt Burow, lay representative

Mr. Chris Eubank, Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of Board for Ministerial Education
Mr. Scott Schmudlach, Martin Luther College
Mr. Brian Treichel, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Mr. Jim Waack, Luther Preparatory School
Mr. Dean Waldschmidt, Board for Ministerial Education

Advisory members:

Ms. Carla Hulke, director of finance for Martin Luther College
Ms. Jamie Ristow, director of finance and accounting for WELS

Financial results and ministry financial plan

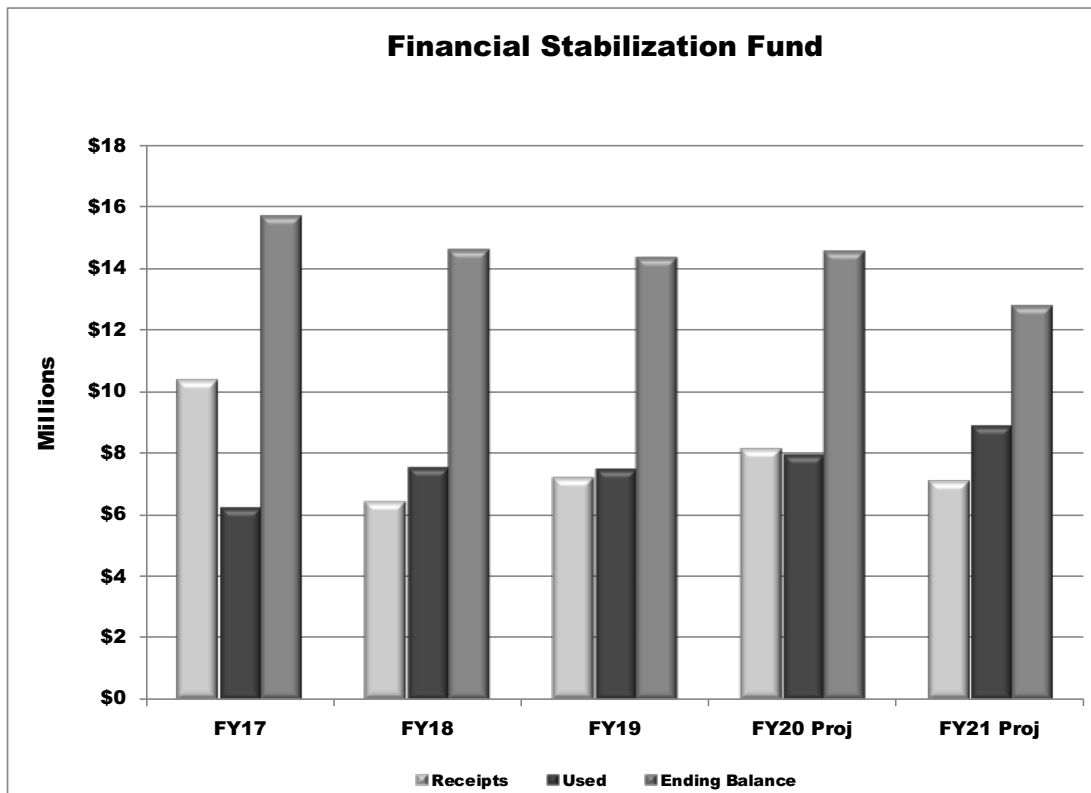
Overview

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 gifts received, revenues generated, and how those moneys are used in various funds based on a fiscal year (FY) that runs from July 1 to June 30. The Operating Fund is used to account for ministry expenses funded by Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) plus other gifts and revenues that do not have donor restrictions. These other gifts and revenues are accounted for in the Financial Stabilization Fund (FSF). The Financial Stabilization Fund was created to ensure that ministry plans did not need to be adjusted in the middle of a year when these difficult-to-predict funding sources turn out to be less than planned. The Synodical Council transfers funds from the Financial Stabilization Fund to the Operating Fund the year(s) after the gift is received. The amount transferred each year is based on the balance of the fund and ministry needs and opportunities. WELS uses Special Funds for gifts that are restricted by donors for a specific ministry. Many of these gifts are not immediately available for ministry. Planning for and use of these gifts is initiated by areas of ministry with guidance from Financial Services and approval of the Synodical Council.

WELS ministerial education schools and Support Services subsidiaries also use Operating and Special Funds for management and reporting. These entities 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. Delegates approve the ministry financial plan and prioritize ministries that were not able to be funded.

Fiscal Year 2018–19 (FY19)



WELS is financially strong. Collectively, WELS Operating Fund, Unrestricted Special Funds, and Financial Stabilization Fund received support of \$47.7 million and expended \$49.6 million which resulted in a decrease in reserves without donor restrictions of \$1.9 million. CMO was \$300,000 less than planned for the fiscal year and has been flat or in decline for more than a decade. Operating expenses were \$700,000 less than planned due to vacant positions, lower health care costs and reducing costs where practical in administrative and support services. FSF inflows were \$300,000 less than outflows, but the ending balance in the FSF was still strong at \$14.3 million. Special Fund reserves without donor restrictions decreased \$1.6 million on support of \$11.9 million and expenses of \$13.5 million. The decrease reflects a planned use of reserves for maintaining and growing ministry. Reserves with donor restrictions increased by \$4 million related to gifts for Christian Aid and Relief and outreach to Vietnam. These gifts will be used for ministry in upcoming fiscal years.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$200,000 to \$7.5 million on support of \$5.4 million and expenses of \$5.2 million. The plan included a \$400,000 decrease in reserves. Support and revenue were in line with the plan. Expenses were less than the plan due to faculty and staff vacancies and lower cost for health care. Reserves with donor restrictions increased \$1 million as a result of increased gifts and investment income.

Martin Luther College is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$200,000 to \$10.2 million on support of \$21.6 million and expenses of \$21.4 million. The plan included an \$800,000 use of reserves. Support and revenue were more than plan due to increased gifts for financial aid. Expenses were less than the plan due to vacancies, lower costs for health care and utilities, utilization of staff to complete projects, and the deferral of some projects to the subsequent year. Reserves with donor restrictions increased \$700,000 as a result of increased gifts and investment income.

Luther Preparatory School is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$300,000 to \$1.7 million on support of \$8.2 million and expenses of \$7.9 million. The plan included a \$200,000 use of reserves. Support and revenue were above plan due to the Wisconsin Parental School Choice program and investment returns. Expenses were less than plan due to the deferral of projects and lower costs for health care and utilities. Reserves with donor restrictions decreased \$100,000 as restricted gifts for tuition assistance were utilized.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary is financially weak. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$100,000 to a balance of \$300,000 on support of \$4.3 million and expenses of \$4.2 million. The plan included a \$100,000 increase in reserves. Support and revenue were more than planned due to gifts for financial aid and an additional grant from WELS of \$350,000, which helped offset lower than planned tuition and fees. Expenses were in line with plan, which included certain cost saving measures. Reserves with donor restrictions remained relatively flat.

WELS Church Extension Fund is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$1.7 million to \$77.2 million on revenues of \$9.9 million and expenses of \$8.2 million. Interest from loans, bequests, and investment returns exceeded interest paid to investors, grants, and administrative costs. Grants totaling \$3.5 million were provided to mission congregations for land and facilities and Home Missions for new mission starts. The increase in reserves is being used to meet loan demand from mission and mission-minded congregations and lower interest rates for borrowers.

WELS Foundation is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions decreased \$400,000 on revenues and gifts of \$4.9 million and expenses of \$5.3 million. WELS Foundation has a policy governing reserves to ensure it can meet the obligations to donors and cover its operating costs. Reserves in excess of those amounts are transferred to WELS as operating support. In FY19, the transfer to WELS was \$500,000.

WELS Investment Funds continued to be financially blessed. WIF does not have reserves because it invests and administers funds for others. An increased investment portfolio from new investors and market gains allowed WIF to reduce its administrative fee charged to the investment portfolios.

Northwestern Publishing House is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions decreased \$200,000 on revenue of \$4.5 million and expenses of \$4.7 million. While revenues were more than planned, the decrease in reserves occurred due to the cost of transitioning to a new operating model, which resulted in the closing of the retail store.

Detailed financial statements for FY19 are available online at cloud.wels.net/finance. Also, please refer to p. 63 for the FY19 consolidating schedules of financial position and activities that provide the results for the year by entity (WELS, its four ministerial education schools, and the ministry support subsidiaries) on a consolidated basis.

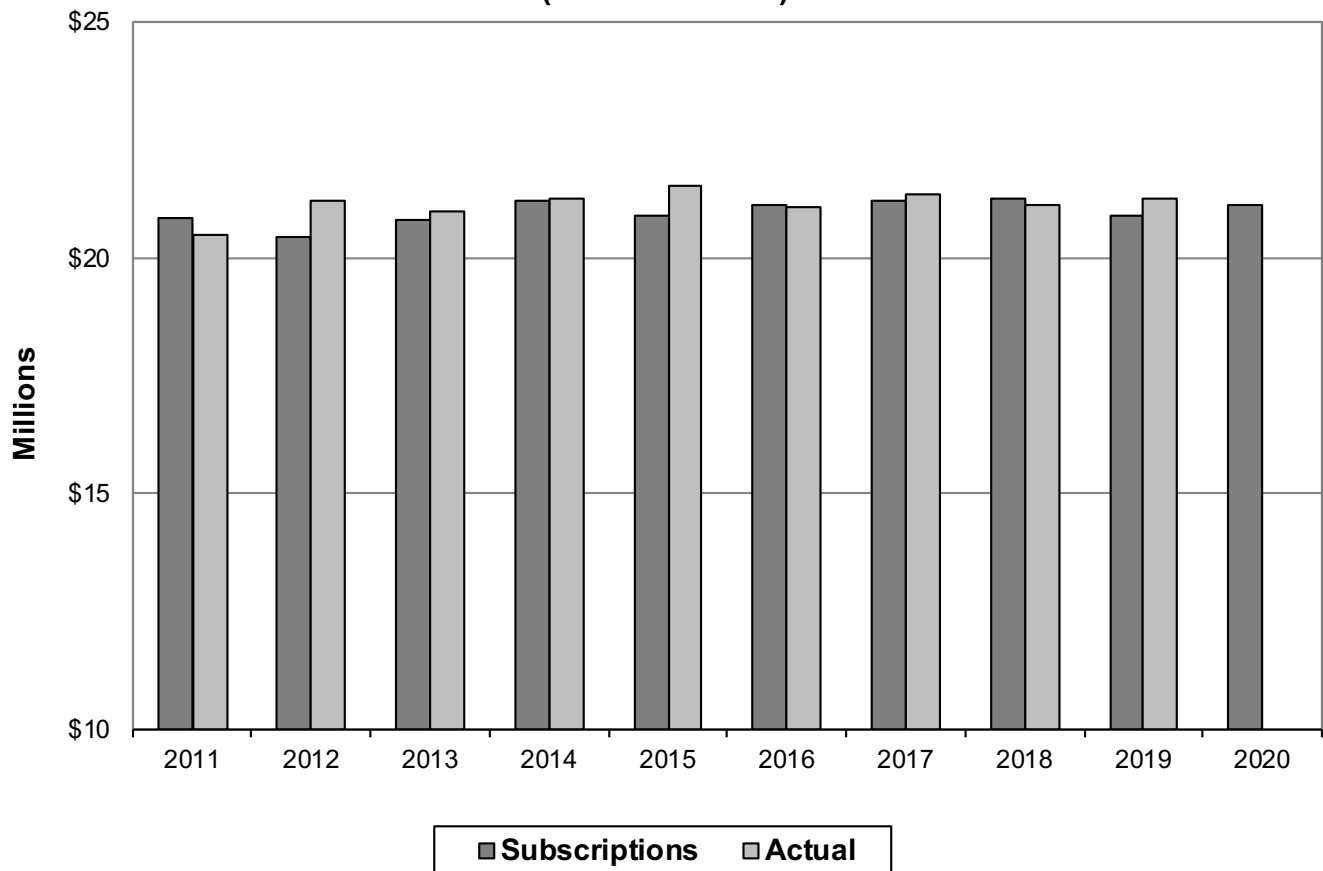
Fiscal Year 2019–20 (FY20)

The statements that follow for FY20 are based on results through Dec. 31, 2019. As of this writing, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has escalated to a health crisis for the United States of America and the world. As a result of the pandemic, gathering sizes have been restricted, schools have had to resort to virtual learning, workers are being asked to work remotely whenever practical, and businesses have been closed. The financial impact of the crisis is evolving and cannot be predicted at this time. God has blessed WELS and its subsidiaries with what appears to be the financial strength to weather this health crisis and the resulting financial implications. Thanks, praise, honor, and glory to God!

Through December 2019, WELS continued to be blessed financially. 2019 CMO receipts of \$21,243,000 exceeded subscriptions by \$330,000 and were \$131,000 or 0.6% percent higher than 2018. 2020 CMO subscriptions of \$21,108,000 are 0.6% less than 2019 receipts but are close to plan due to increased 2019 receipts. Gifts, bequests, foundation grants, and investment returns have been stronger than planned. Expenses in Congregational & District Ministry and Support Services are less than plan due to vacancies and continued efforts to hold down costs whenever practical. Forecasts in early 2020, based on these results and trends, reflected an anticipated increase in the FSF balance of \$200,000 by the end of the fiscal year, compared with a planned decrease of \$1.7 million.

Special Fund reserves without donor restrictions increased \$1.2 million on support of \$7.5 million and expenses of \$6.3 million through December. The increase is a result of grants received and fees collected early in the fiscal year that will continue to be utilized throughout the fiscal year. A decrease in reserves without donor restrictions of nearly \$1 million is anticipated for the year and continues to reflect a planned use of reserves for maintaining and growing ministry. Reserves with donor restrictions have also increased due to gifts, bequests, and investment income that have been higher than planned.

**Congregation Mission Offerings
(Calendar Year)**



Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is financially strong. Through the first six months of the fiscal year, reserves without donor restrictions increased \$650,000 as a result of higher-than-planned gifts, bequests, and investment income. Expenses are anticipated to be in line with plan for the year. Reserves with donor restrictions increased \$1.3 million due to higher gifts and investment income.

Martin Luther College is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions have increased \$1.8 million through December, the result of increased gifts and lower expenses due to position vacancies and lower health care. Reserves with donor restrictions increased \$1.1 million as a result of large bequests, gifts received for student financial aid, and the "Equipping Christian Witnesses" campaign. Investment income was also favorable through December.

Luther Preparatory School is financially stable. Through December, reserves without donor restrictions increased \$260,000 on increased special support grants from WELS and grants from the Wisconsin Parental School Choice program. Reserves with donor restrictions increased \$140,000 as a result of increased gifts and investment activity.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary is financially weak. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$100,000 through December as a result of increased gifts and support grants from WELS. Reserves with donor restrictions remained flat through December.

WELS Church Extension Fund is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$189,000 through December. Grants to mission congregations for land and facilities and to Home Missions for mission starts totaled \$3 million for the first six months of the fiscal year.

WELS Foundation is financially strong. Reserves without donor restrictions increased \$250,000 through December based on gifts and revenues of nearly \$3.6 million and expenses of \$3.3. Reserves with donor restrictions increased \$3.7 million due to gifts and investment returns.

WELS Investment Funds continues to be financially blessed. Through December 2019, investments at WELS Investment Funds were valued at \$223 million. Since WIF invests and administers funds for others, it holds no reserves. Administration fees charged by WIF cover necessary expenses.

Northwestern Publishing House is financially stable. Reserves without donor restrictions increased nearly \$700,000 on revenue of \$2.9 million and expenses of \$2.2 million. The year started off strong with higher sales related to the EHV Bible and newly released catechism products. Sale growth and expense savings are anticipated to slow somewhat in the second half of the year. Northwestern Publishing House's former site of operations is still available for sale.

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Schedule of Financial Position
As of June 30, 2019

ASSETS

	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	CEF	Foundation	WIF	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 36,059,356	\$ 1,749,213	\$ (99,800)	\$ 725,732	\$ 10,836,395	\$ 19,112,497	\$ 1,036,047	\$ -	\$ 613,866	\$ 22,317	\$ 70,055,623
Cash restricted for gift annuities and trusts payable	-	-	-	-	-	-	560,782	-	-	-	560,782
Investments	3,909,522	-	-	-	-	27,463,055	139,540,984	222,987,444	2,934,107	(173,624,131)	223,210,981
Accounts receivable, net	547,167	53,134	28,496	63,030	1,405	59,008	-	135,767	542,170	(135,767)	1,294,410
Gifts and bequests receivable, net	1,341,498	49,799	-	40,186	43,968	529,787	109,522	-	-	-	2,114,760
Accrued interest receivable	-	-	-	-	-	355,785	-	-	-	-	355,785
Inventories, net	-	170,043	66,456	29,043	13,676	-	-	-	1,758,204	-	2,037,422
Loans to students, net	-	942,572	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	942,572
Property and real estate held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,126,134	-	695,698	-	2,821,832
Loans receivable from congregations, net	-	-	-	-	-	156,432,119	-	-	-	(4,520)	156,427,599
Cash surrender value of life insurance policies	-	48,450	37,216	13,721	-	-	1,189,448	-	-	-	1,288,835
Assets held in trust outside WELS	620,418	1,174,267	-	263,841	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,058,526
Other assets	941,620	150,599	75,403	1,311	48,961	14,575	-	-	76,173	-	1,308,642
Interest in net assets of WELS Foundation	15,429,261	2,106,360	1,665,246	2,148,507	267,656	321,840	-	-	-	(21,938,870)	-
Beneficial interest - assets held by WELS Foundation	16,098,818	2,542,653	2,120,489	267,470	536,828	-	-	-	-	(21,566,258)	-
Property, plant and equipment, net	7,261,248	23,321,308	3,888,114	5,471,428	8,077,978	-	-	-	870,195	-	48,890,271
Investment in CEF certificates	4,817,871	2,036,756	934,332	12,995	-	-	3,179,796	-	-	(10,981,750)	-
Interest in assets of WELS Foundation	21,286,245	13,077,864	16,090,910	1,361,425	2,025,635	-	-	-	-	(53,842,079)	-
Due from related party	2,378,654	5,198,331	1,894,316	-	(7,848,024)	(58,442)	(151,008)	878,203	755,378	(3,047,408)	-
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 106,782,156	\$ 56,530,871	\$ 26,701,178	\$ 10,398,689	\$ 14,004,478	\$ 204,230,224	\$ 147,591,705	\$ 224,001,414	\$ 8,245,791	\$ (285,118,466)	\$ 513,368,040

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Schedule of Financial Position (continued)
As of June 30, 2019

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	CEF	Foundation	WIF	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
LIABILITIES											
Accounts payable	\$ 1,162,594	\$ 622,799	\$ 38,564	\$ 11,453	\$ 77,758	\$ 7,433	\$ 11,944	\$ -	\$ 249,579	\$ -	\$ 2,182,124
Accrued expenses and other liabilities	2,751,400	368,611	87,434	78,578	235,417	5,252,907	56,245	548,010	402,059	(559,083)	9,221,578
Deferred revenue	152,532	411,217	109,670	29,790	77,444	-	-	-	608,291	-	1,386,944
Retiree health benefits payable	1,222,323	-	-	-	-	94,034,465	-	-	-	(10,970,677)	1,222,323
Certificates payable	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	83,063,788
Deposits held in custody	138,983	8,869	1,612	4,878	30,060	-	-	-	-	-	184,402
Liabilities to other beneficiaries	-	1,352,380	-	-	-	-	15,741,912	-	-	-	17,094,292
Liabilities to outside agencies and organizations	1,944,532	587,180	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50,241,516	52,773,228
Gift annuities payable, at fair value	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,317,964	-	-	-	8,317,964
Trusts payable	-	-	-	-	-	-	15,779,690	-	-	-	15,779,690
U.S. government grants refundable	-	877,740	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	877,740
Due to WELS and Schools	882,723	750,087	159,302	214,610	1,049,502	-	53,815,466	-	-	(53,815,466)	-
Due to related party	8,255,087	4,978,883	396,582	339,309	1,470,181	99,294,805	93,723,221	548,010	1,259,929	(18,159,934)	192,106,073
NET ASSETS											
Without donor restrictions	36,984,530	10,191,622	7,481,068	300,239	1,992,783	77,150,536	9,798,388	223,453,404	6,917,330	(186,072,950)	188,196,950
With donor restrictions	61,542,539	41,360,366	18,823,528	9,759,141	10,541,514	27,784,883	44,070,096	-	68,532	(80,885,582)	133,065,017
Total Net Assets	<u>98,527,069</u>	<u>51,551,988</u>	<u>26,304,596</u>	<u>10,059,380</u>	<u>12,534,297</u>	<u>104,935,419</u>	<u>53,868,484</u>	<u>223,453,404</u>	<u>6,985,862</u>	<u>(266,958,532)</u>	<u>321,261,967</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	<u>\$ 106,782,156</u>	<u>\$ 56,530,871</u>	<u>\$ 26,701,178</u>	<u>\$ 10,398,689</u>	<u>\$ 14,004,478</u>	<u>\$ 204,230,224</u>	<u>\$ 147,591,705</u>	<u>\$ 224,001,414</u>	<u>\$ 8,245,791</u>	<u>\$ (285,118,465)</u>	<u>\$ 513,368,040</u>

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Schedule of Activities
As of and For the Year Ended June 30, 2019

Without donor restrictions

	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	CEF	Foundation	WIF	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
MEMBER SUPPORT, REVENUES, AND RECLASSIFICATIONS											
Member support:											
Offerings from congregations	\$ 21,074,288	\$ 764,593	\$ 561,629	\$ 98,842	\$ 202,720	\$ 118,227	\$ 614,922	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 21,074,288
Gifts and grants	3,841,158	37,667	43,385	48,132	-	622,649	192,480	-	-	(1,943,255)	4,258,836
Bequests	1,306,693	802,260	605,014	146,974	202,720	740,876	807,402	-	-	(1,943,255)	2,251,006
Total Member Support	26,222,139	1,874,420	1,770,028	393,948	405,440	1,481,752	1,614,804	-	-	-	27,584,130
Revenues:											
Student tuition and fees, net	5,496	12,809,837	774,288	1,500,755	4,193,896	-	-	-	-	-	19,284,272
Activity fees and retail sales	1,927,382	909,444	62,892	175,363	166,748	-	-	12,006,313	4,019,945	(12,548,661)	6,719,426
Investment returns, net	1,052,789	316,060	427,668	105	65,186	7,090,077	318,068	13,201,575	233,449	(12,787,853)	9,917,124
Net loss on sale of property and real estate held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-	(49,681)	-	-	-	(49,681)
Change in value of trust agreements	-	18,529	-	233	-	-	-	-	-	-	18,762
Other	417,497	69,851	40,892	2,000	70,014	-	638,381	-	296,497	(56,509)	1,478,623
Transfers from other funds	9,687,474	3,689,528	2,010,826	1,629,381	2,784,690	-	87,568	-	6,488	(19,895,955)	-
Total Revenues	13,090,638	17,813,249	3,316,566	3,307,837	7,280,534	7,090,077	994,336	25,207,888	4,556,379	(45,288,378)	37,368,526
Net assets released from restrictions	8,341,648	3,007,667	1,522,518	870,721	739,311	2,094,156	3,059,644	-	-	(4,028,745)	15,606,920
Total Member Support, Revenues, and Reclassifications	47,654,425	21,623,176	5,444,098	4,325,532	8,222,565	9,925,109	4,861,382	25,207,888	4,556,379	(51,260,978)	80,559,576
EXPENSES											
Program services											
Ministerial education	9,316,775	17,743,826	4,273,974	3,459,794	6,994,532	-	-	-	-	(10,994,075)	30,794,826
World missions	10,483,456	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(524,050)	9,959,406
Home missions	9,684,131	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(664,221)	9,019,910
Congregational and district ministry	6,565,876	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(619,734)	5,946,142
Northwestern Publishing House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,504,488	(24,754)	3,479,734
Total Program Services	36,050,238	17,743,826	4,273,974	3,459,794	6,994,532	-	-	-	3,504,488	(12,826,834)	59,200,016
Support services											
Ministry support subsidiaries	4,018,861	2,970,340	660,920	726,370	842,342	7,915,958	1,622,261	410,761	1,217,968	(2,104,987)	7,433,232
General and administrative	2,032,686	686,495	309,518	16,754	78,717	337,974	298,690	-	-	(528,934)	10,955,292
Mission advancement	7,505,929	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	65,030	3,189,200
Transfers to other funds	13,557,476	3,656,835	970,438	743,124	921,059	8,253,932	3,361,189	16,482,258	-	(27,349,376)	-
Total Support Services	49,607,714	21,400,661	5,244,412	4,202,918	7,915,591	8,253,932	5,282,140	16,893,019	1,217,968	(29,918,267)	21,577,724
Total Expenses	(1,953,289)	222,515	199,686	122,614	306,974	1,671,177	(420,758)	8,314,869	(166,077)	(8,515,877)	(218,166)
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS											
NET ASSETS - Beginning of Year	38,937,819	9,969,107	7,281,382	177,625	1,685,809	75,479,359	10,219,146	215,138,535	7,083,407	(177,557,073)	188,415,116
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$ 36,984,530	\$ 10,191,622	\$ 7,481,068	\$ 300,239	\$ 1,992,783	\$ 77,150,536	\$ 9,798,388	\$ 223,453,404	\$ 6,917,330	\$ (186,072,950)	\$ 188,196,950

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Consolidating Schedule of Activities (continued)
As of and For the Year Ended June 30, 2019

With donor restrictions

	WELS	MLC	WLS	MLS	LPS	CEF	Foundation	WIF	NPH	Eliminations	Consolidated
MEMBER SUPPORT, REVENUES, AND RECLASSIFICATIONS											
Member support:											
Gifts and grants	\$ 8,157,167	\$ 1,303,609	\$ 1,211,120	\$ 498,580	\$ 310,696	\$ -	\$ 1,170,729	\$ -	\$ 41,000	\$ -	\$ 12,692,901
Bequests	366,079	168,319	136,847	-	12,410	-	151,740	-	-	-	835,395
Total Member Support	<u>8,523,246</u>	<u>1,471,928</u>	<u>1,347,967</u>	<u>498,580</u>	<u>323,106</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,322,469</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>41,000</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>13,528,296</u>
Revenues:											
Investment returns, net	1,163,347	822,081	502,776	97,180	81,491	1,005,610	4,409,457	-	-	-	8,081,942
Net loss on sale of property and real estate held for sale	-	-	-	-	-	-	(137,777)	-	-	-	(137,777)
Change in value of trust agreements	2,631,096	591,597	446,862	83,965	69,708	98,181	(890,050)	-	-	(3,949,859)	(918,500)
Redesignated fixed asset additions	-	849,650	196,938	218,686	173,140	-	-	-	-	(1,438,414)	-
Other	70,333	-	(1,259)	-	1,708	-	3,600	-	-	(28,337)	74,382
Transfers from other funds	-	-	28,337	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Revenues	<u>3,864,776</u>	<u>2,263,328</u>	<u>1,173,654</u>	<u>399,831</u>	<u>326,047</u>	<u>1,103,791</u>	<u>3,385,230</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>(5,416,610)</u>	<u>7,100,047</u>
Net assets released from restrictions	<u>(8,341,648)</u>	<u>(3,007,667)</u>	<u>(1,522,518)</u>	<u>(870,721)</u>	<u>(739,311)</u>	<u>(2,094,156)</u>	<u>(3,059,644)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>4,028,745</u>	<u>(15,606,920)</u>
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	<u>4,046,374</u>	<u>727,589</u>	<u>999,103</u>	<u>27,690</u>	<u>(90,158)</u>	<u>(990,365)</u>	<u>1,648,055</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>41,000</u>	<u>(1,387,865)</u>	<u>5,021,423</u>
NET ASSETS - Beginning of Year	<u>57,496,165</u>	<u>40,632,777</u>	<u>17,824,425</u>	<u>9,731,451</u>	<u>10,631,672</u>	<u>28,775,248</u>	<u>42,422,041</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>27,532</u>	<u>(79,497,717)</u>	<u>128,043,594</u>
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	<u>\$ 61,542,539</u>	<u>\$ 41,360,366</u>	<u>\$ 18,823,528</u>	<u>\$ 9,759,141</u>	<u>\$ 10,541,514</u>	<u>\$ 27,784,883</u>	<u>\$ 44,070,096</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ 68,532</u>	<u>\$ (80,885,582)</u>	<u>\$ 133,065,017</u>

Synodical salary range assignments

Salary matrix for 2020–21 is available on p. 63.

Early childhood ministry teacher (no degree)	A
Early childhood ministry teacher (associate degree)	B
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, a teacher with 10 years' experience should receive a salary between \$34,687 and \$39,891. Salaries greater than \$34,687 would recognize additional education credentials and 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, housing allowances, and 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.
2. Cash housing allowance if not provided housing (using HUD Fair Market Rental Values established upon hire date + adjusted annually based on the percent change for the salary matrix. For 2019–20 and 2020–21 this adjustment would be .75 percent).
3. SECA allowance (7.65 percent of salary, cost of living, and housing value/cash housing/fair market rental of parsonage-teacherage).
4. Housing equity of 2 percent of entry-level base (Column C, 0 years of service) for workers in provided housing (parsonage/teacherage). Amount is \$595 for 2020–21.
5. VEBA health insurance.
6. WELS Pension.
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 2019–20 the president received above base compensation in the amount of \$42,370, which reflects a .75 percent increase from 2018–19. In 2020–21, this component of the president’s compensation will be increased by .75 percent to \$42,688.

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.

Synod schedule

0.75% Inflation Rate Adjustment

WELS COMPENSATION GUIDELINES

Salary matrix

2020-21

	11,893	12,636	14,866	15,610	16,353	17,096	17,839	18,583	19,326	20,069
Range spread	396	421	496	520	545	570	595	619	644	669
<i>Service increments</i>										
Ranges	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
<i>Experience</i>										
0	23,786	25,272	29,732	31,219	32,705	34,192	35,678	37,165	38,652	40,138
1	24,182	25,693	30,228	31,739	33,250	34,762	36,273	37,784	39,296	40,807
2	24,579	26,114	30,723	32,260	33,795	35,332	36,867	38,404	39,940	41,476
3	24,975	26,536	31,219	32,780	34,340	35,902	37,462	39,023	40,585	42,145
4	25,372	26,957	31,714	33,300	34,885	36,471	38,057	39,643	41,229	42,814
5	25,768	27,378	32,210	33,821	35,430	37,041	38,651	40,262	41,873	43,483
6	26,165	27,799	32,705	34,341	35,976	37,611	39,246	40,882	42,517	44,152
7	26,561	28,220	33,201	34,861	36,521	38,181	39,840	41,501	43,161	44,821
8	26,957	28,642	33,696	35,382	37,066	38,751	40,435	42,120	43,806	45,490
9	27,354	29,063	34,192	35,902	37,611	39,321	41,030	42,740	44,450	46,159
10	27,750	29,484	34,687	36,422	38,156	39,891	41,624	43,359	45,094	46,828
11	28,147	29,905	35,183	36,942	38,701	40,461	42,219	43,979	45,738	47,497
12	28,543	30,326	35,678	37,463	39,246	41,030	42,814	44,598	46,382	48,166
13	28,940	30,748	36,174	37,983	39,791	41,600	43,408	45,217	47,027	48,835
14	29,336	31,169	36,669	38,503	40,336	42,170	44,003	45,837	47,671	49,504
15	29,733	31,590	37,165	39,024	40,881	42,740	44,598	46,456	48,315	50,173
16	30,129	32,011	37,661	39,544	41,426	43,310	45,192	47,076	48,959	50,841
17	30,525	32,432	38,156	40,064	41,971	43,880	45,787	47,695	49,603	51,510
18	30,922	32,854	38,652	40,585	42,517	44,450	46,381	48,315	50,248	52,179
19	31,318	33,275	39,147	41,105	43,062	45,019	46,976	48,934	50,892	52,848
20	31,715	33,696	39,643	41,625	43,607	45,589	47,571	49,553	51,536	53,517
21	32,111	34,117	40,138	42,146	44,152	46,159	48,165	50,173	52,180	54,186
22	32,508	34,538	40,634	42,666	44,697	46,729	48,760	50,792	52,824	54,855
23	32,904	34,960	41,129	43,186	45,242	47,299	49,355	51,412	53,469	55,524
24	33,300	35,381	41,625	43,707	45,787	47,869	49,949	52,031	54,113	56,193
25	33,697	35,802	42,120	44,227	46,332	48,439	50,544	52,650	54,757	56,862
26	34,093	36,223	42,616	44,747	46,877	49,009	51,138	53,270	55,401	57,531
27	34,490	36,644	43,111	45,268	47,422	49,578	51,733	53,889	56,045	58,200
28	34,886	37,066	43,607	45,788	47,967	50,148	52,328	54,509	56,690	58,869
29	35,283	37,487	44,102	46,308	48,512	50,718	52,922	55,128	57,334	59,538
30	35,679	37,908	44,598	46,829	49,058	51,288	53,517	55,747	57,978	60,207
31	36,075	38,329	45,094	47,349	49,603	51,858	54,112	56,367	58,622	60,876
32	36,472	38,750	45,589	47,869	50,148	52,428	54,706	56,986	59,266	61,545

See p. 61 for current synodical salary range assignments and above base compensation for called workers.

Missions

Board for Home Missions

Our calling

While the figures are mind boggling, they are understandable. As many Americans follow the process of the 2020 presidential election, they hear how much money is being raised and spent by all the candidates—mind boggling, astounding numbers. Even though the financial figures are sometimes incomprehensible, they are understandable. Each person has the firm conviction he or she is the person who should be leading the United States. They are putting their money (and the money of others) where their convictions are.

Down through time, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has done the same. Do you realize that since 1960 WELS has planted 630 new mission churches through Home Missions? While the time wasn't taken to financially factor what it cost to start that many missions, it is significant. From synod support the past 10 fiscal years, Home Missions has received just under \$55 million to plant new mission churches (this total doesn't include Church Extension Fund financial support or direct gifts from WELS members to the ministry of Home Missions). Our church body is putting its money where its conviction is.

There's a reason for this. We know about a much greater cost that the God-man paid to cover the sins of mankind, to cover our sins. The familiar words from Dr. Martin Luther's meaning to the 2nd Article come to mind, "For he [Christ Jesus] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death." When we talk about conviction, there was none greater than what Jesus displayed. The King of the Universe humbled himself to "buy us back" from our sins. He has made it possible for us to be members of his family.

When we hear this message and the Spirit plants faith, there's a conviction that is stirred up in our heart. This message is too good to be enjoyed just by us. Jesus' directive to go moves us to do what the psalmist encourages, "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations and his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Psalm 96:1-3). By continuing to plant more churches, WELS is demonstrating its commitment to do what the Lord tells us to do—tell more people about the Savior of the world—Jesus Christ.

Our current situation

Campus Ministry

While Home Missions' primary purpose is to plant missions, Home Missions also serves students on college campuses. For almost 40 years this support has been offered through the Campus Ministry Committee, currently chaired by Pastor Scott Wolfram. Come September 2020, WELS Campus Ministry will have been serving college students for 100 years. Here's a brief history as to the origin of Campus Ministry.

"On September 26, 1920, the first Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) Campus Ministry began in the United States. During those Synodical Conference years, the LCMS South Wisconsin District and WELS Western Wisconsin District jointly called Dr. Adolph Haentzschel to serve the spiritual care of Lutheran Synodical Conference students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He was the first full-time campus pastor for WELS–LCMS in the country. 48 attended the first service in 1920 which was held only one-half block from the current WELS Chapel in Madison, WI. Between 1920-1961 WELS students participated in churches near colleges or on campus with Gamma Delta, the college ministry of the Walther League which began in 1928. In 1961 WELS suspended fellowship with LCMS and WELS formed the Student Services

Committee and Lutheran Collegians (1965-1982) to serve students. Since 1982 the Campus Ministry Committee of the WELS Board for Home Missions has been overseeing our national student ministry.” (Written by sainted Pastor Thomas Trapp. For 38 years of his ministry, Trapp served in campus ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.)

Under the theme “Connecting Campus to Christ” and using Colossians 2:6-8 as the theme Bible verses, the Campus Ministry Committee is celebrating this milestone 100th anniversary by putting together various resources for congregations to use to both celebrate the anniversary at their congregations and support campus ministry programs around North America. A new Campus Ministry Toolkit, filled with ideas and resources for individuals and congregations to use to get involved, can be found at wels.net/cmtoolkit. In the toolkit congregations will also find worship resources to hold a special Campus Ministry mission festival service, which the Campus Ministry Committee is recommending churches celebrate on September 27, 2020. The Campus Ministry webpages have been refreshed to offer additional resources and links for both college students and campus ministry supporters at wels.net/cm100. Campus Ministry will also be featured in the August 2020 *WELS Connection*. *Forward in Christ* articles, Missions blogs, bulletin inserts, and other resources will be used to celebrate this milestone anniversary.

Currently WELS Campus Ministry financially supports 11 larger campus ministries and provides funding for another 18 smaller campus ministries. Approximately 6,325 names of college students are in the Campus Ministry database. The Campus Ministry Committee is considering expanding its support with a campus ministry mission counselor. The primary focuses of this counselor would be to support current campus ministries, encourage more WELS churches to be active in campus ministry, and connect more international students at our area Lutheran high schools who continue education at a U.S. college to a WELS campus ministry.

Every two years in May the Campus Ministry Committee sponsors a Campus Ministry Staff Conference. That conference will take place in mid-May 2021. In the year when there is no Campus Ministry Staff Conference, the CMC plans to have a pastor’s conference for campus ministries that receive funding support. The prayer is that these annual conferences will assist more campus ministry activity.

Status of Home Missions

As has been its practice, each spring the Board for Home Missions meets. The highlight of the meeting is to approve locations where new missions will start. In the spring (and fall) of 2018, 10 new missions were approved. In addition, 7 enhancements were approved. At the spring 2019 meeting, 3 new missions and 1 enhancement were approved. Over the past 10 years, the Board for Home Missions is thankful to the Lord that 55 missions were planted and 34 enhancements were approved.

Two of the three missions that were authorized at the 2019 spring meeting are supplying the majority of their funding for their first two years. One of the locations had an anonymous \$500,000 gift. The other location had a church give it the proceeds from the sale of its facility. These special gifts allowed these two locations to start as unsubsidized missions with the understanding that in two years these missions would receive financial support through the Home Missions budget.

During the 2019–20 fiscal year, Home Missions supports and serves 86 subsidized missions, which includes 22 cross-cultural ministries. Another 35 unsubsidized missions are receiving support from Home Missions. These 35 unsubsidized missions are missions in every way except they don’t receive financial support.

Pilot “coaching” program

To assist mission pastors in their first 24-30 months serving at a mission, the Board for Home Missions (BHM) is field testing a pilot “coaching” program. The pastor who is called or assigned to a new home mission is provided a “coach.” The “coach” is a mission pastor himself who has had recent experience in starting a mission. During a monthly phone call and a once-a-year visit, these new home mission pastors are coached following a specific curriculum. Recognizing the challenges that come with starting a mission, this program looks to offer additional support to the mission pastor and the mission he serves. At the next Board for Home Missions meeting, the board will determine if the pilot program becomes a permanent fixture in the ministry of Home Missions.

The Home Missions team

Each home mission congregation has its own unique ministry plan for reaching out to its community to share the name of Jesus Christ. Two Home Missions counselors—Pastor Mark Birkholz and Pastor Matt Vogt—help these missions and their pastors make the most effective use of human and financial resources for mission outreach.

Humanly speaking, the desire is to assist missions to work toward becoming self-sustaining. A third missions counselor position is vacant. As full-time gospel servants, the value of mission counselors can't be overstated as part of the Home Missions team.

The Board for Home Missions has 14 district mission boards, which the board relies on to do the "heavy lifting" of researching, identifying, and recommending new locations for funding. Please understand, new missions just don't happen. There is a lot of faithful, persistent work that takes place long before any paperwork is submitted to the Board for Home Missions or any mission pastor knocks on the first door. These district mission boards are also responsible for supporting existing missions in their districts, with the end-goal that a mission becomes self-sustaining in 8 to 12 years after inception. Of course, the overarching goal is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to countless numbers of the redeemed.

Of the 22 cross-cultural ministries supported by Home Missions, 11 are Hispanic ministries. To help support these missions as well as to work toward starting more Hispanic ministry in WELS, Home Missions has a Hispanic outreach consultant, Pastor Tim Flunker. In addition to serving and assisting the 11 subsidized congregations, each year Flunker works with a dozen or more established congregations to help ascertain the viability of doing inter-cultural outreach in their neighborhood. He helps them with outreach plans, provides individualized training sessions, and works with individuals to implement assimilation efforts in their inter-cultural setting. Overall, 109 WELS churches have some type of Hispanic ministry.

Seven Missions staff members work at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis. Rounding out the Home Missions team is its chairman, Pastor Wayne Uhlhorn. Home Missions appreciates Uhlhorn's leadership and active, hands-on role. Uhlhorn serves as a full-time pastor at Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif.

Home Missions' partners

Home Missions also 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. In addition to the ministry the Joint Mission Council supports, the council also subsidizes three home missions. See p. 73 for a full report on the Joint Mission Council.

Through the ministry of the Church Extension Fund, loans are made to mission churches to purchase land and help build or purchase/renovate their first worship facility. Not only does the Church Extension Fund give loans, through its grant programs mission churches receive additional financial support that lowers the loan and the amount of interest paid over the life of the loan. Since 1993, more than \$39 million in grants have been made to mission congregations.

In addition to loans and grants for land and facilities to home mission congregations, the Church Extension Fund Board of Directors can also make grants to Home Missions. Since August 2016, the Church Extension Fund has given grants totaling \$5,425,000 to Home Missions. Without these grants, Home Missions would not have been able to open as many missions as it has these past fiscal years.

The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society is another active partner serving both Home and World Missions. The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society produces an annual prayer calendar featuring an aspect of WELS missions. The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society supports the Befriend a Missionary program. Its spring and fall rallies feature mission work in North America as well as around the world. At the rallies, offerings are collected. Both Home and World Missions special project funds receive financial support so missions can do "extra ministry" over and above their budgets. And at the annual national convention, sometimes close to \$200,000 in gifts are offered to Missions. We give thanks to the Lord for the continued generous support of LWMS.

Missions team work

Over the years, Home Missions has produced its share of strategic plans. In its recent effort to produce the next strategic plan, Home Missions has used the Vision Traction Organizer model. In October 2017, the Board for Home Missions Executive Committee spent two-and-a-half days working through the Vision Traction Organizer process. A six-year strategic plan was put together. From there the district mission boards have received training (August 2018) in putting together their own Vision Traction Organizer. The goal of having all 14 mission districts presenting and implementing a strategic plan by September 2019 was reached.

A WELS Missions Facebook page was launched in June 2018. "Like" the page at [fb.com/WELSmissions](https://www.facebook.com/WELSmissions) for an easy way to stay up to date on news from home and world mission fields, read inspiring stories of the gospel at work, and take advantage of the many resources WELS Missions has to offer.

Another way in which the message of WELS Missions is getting out is through weekly blogging. To subscribe to the Missions blog, visit wels.net/subscribe.

For any promotional materials to use in making Home Missions presentations, visit the WELS Resource Center: missions.welsrc.net. You can also learn more about home missions by visiting wels.net/homemissions.

WELS Missions is excited to partner with our friends at the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society to host an online event called *Taste and See!* This first-of-its-kind event will combine the very best of Taste of Missions and the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society Convention to provide all WELS members an opportunity to be an important part of gospel outreach occurring in our synod. Tune in beginning on Saturday, June 27, to watch livestreamed opening worship service with brothers and sisters around the world. From June 28–July 10, learn about Missions through keynote presentations, recorded workshops, mission-minded daily devotions, and more. Participate in family-friendly scavenger hunts, try your hand at making ethnic recipes shared by our missionaries, and ask questions during live Q&A sessions with Home and World Missions representatives. We will wrap up the online festivities with the livestreamed commissioning of new missionaries on Saturday, July 11. Visit welstasteandsee.com for more information.

A look ahead

The purpose of Home Missions is to plant churches so more people can hear the gospel. Here is a portion of a message from a mission church in Macomb, Mich., that details the experience of three first-time visitors on March 15, 2020:

“We decided to continue with our regular schedule of worship, fellowship, and Bible study on Sunday, March 15. It was not an easy decision. Many churches in our area were closed. . . . To prepare for services we made sure we had used bleach water to wipe down all the surfaces people would touch in a normal morning. . . . At the beginning of worship, we explained what steps we had taken and what adjustments we were making to our service in an effort to put visitors at ease. . . . Even though attendance was down (several of our seasoned-citizens chose to stay home), those who worshiped covered the age spectrum and included both members and regular attenders but not yet members.

“Here’s the cool thing: we had three first-time visitors in worship today. A young couple, Shawn and Martin C., entered our building for the first time. They had just moved into the neighborhood. If we had been closed today, they would not have known we were closed until they arrived at our locked doors. Instead, they were welcomed and worshiped with us. Lorraine A. also worshiped with us for the first time today. I had called on her son many months ago in the hospital. He was not then and is not now a member and he has not been back to worship. She explained that her son and husband had both gone through very serious illnesses over the past year. Now this coronavirus had raised her anxiety level again. She wanted to get some encouragement and calm by attending a worship service, but the church near her was closed. If our doors would have been closed, would she ever have returned? I will follow up with her, too, this week. I am not going to cast aspersions on any of our WELS churches who chose to cancel services. Each congregation has to respond to its own situation and to do what’s best in its community and for its congregation. I am just really glad that we were open today. This outpost of the kingdom had three new visitors. Those who were here today found hope, comfort, and strength for the week through God’s Word.”

As the Lord enables, through Home Missions our church body will keep planting missions churches so through the powerful Word of God, hearts infected with the deadly virus of sin can be cleansed as they hear God’s Word and through the working of the Spirit be made perfectly pure, sin-free. We pray the Lord so bless all our churches and all his children to continue to proclaim the saving name of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Keith Free, reporter

Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman

Rev. Fredric Berger, Nebraska Mission District

Rev. Timothy Bode, Minnesota Mission District

Mr. Dallas Christ, Nebraska Mission District

Mr. John Deschane, Northern Wisconsin Mission District

Mr. Matthew Dettmann, Colorado Mission District

Rev. Benjamin Enstad, Northern Wisconsin Mission District
Rev. Matthew Frey, Colorado Mission District
Rev. Mark Gabb, South Atlantic Mission District
Rev. Harland Goetzinger, WELS–Canada Mission District
Mr. Mark Greiner, Michigan Mission District
Mr. Paul Hahm, North Atlantic Mission District
Mr. Mark Hartman, South Central Mission District
Mr. Mel Kam, Pacific Northwest Mission District
Rev. Jonathan Kolander, Arizona-California Mission District
Mr. Scott Krause, Western Wisconsin Mission District
Rev. Robert Krueger, Michigan Mission District
Mr. Noel Ledermann, Arizona-California Mission District
Mr. Werner Lomker, WELS–Canada Mission District
Rev. Jeffrey Mahnke, Western Wisconsin Mission District
Mr. Jude Peck, South Atlantic Mission District
Senior Master Sergeant Gerald Pepke, Dakota-Montana Mission District
Mr. David Sauer, Minnesota Mission District
Rev. Caleb Schoeneck, South Central Mission District
Rev. Mark Wagner, Southeastern Wisconsin Mission District
Rev. Craig Wasser, Pacific Northwest Mission District
Rev. Kevin Wattles, North Atlantic Mission District
Rev. Jonathan Werre, Dakota-Montana Mission District
Mr. Steven Wolf, Southeastern Wisconsin Mission District

Advisory:

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions
Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president
Mr. Sean Young, director of WELS Missions Operations

Board for World Missions

Our calling

Christ's love has done what no human being could ever imagine. He came to this world and gave himself to guarantee our eternity at his side. This love fills our hearts and by God's powerful Spirit overflows to touch the lives of those around us. Christ has called us to keep reaching even further with his love. Our calling includes being witnesses to the multitudes on this planet who still do not know what our loving Savior has done. In response to our calling, the Board for World Missions is directed to carry out "... the responsibility of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ for the discipling of all people living outside the United States of America and Canada and those people who, because of cultural barriers, have not been made the responsibility of other agencies of WELS" (WELS Bylaws, Sec. 6.1). Into a world that desperately needs it, our missionaries and national church partners bring the light of God's Word. With this powerful tool deployed and in the hands of the Lord of the Church, our work is bearing much fruit.

Our current situation

WELS World Missions conducts and encourages gospel outreach in 40 foreign countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 17 prospective new mission fields. World Missions brings the light of God's Word through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials in foreign languages. Thirty-nine world missionaries partner with more than 400 national pastors to conduct outreach and train more than 380 seminary students for service in Christ's kingdom.

Every country and opportunity has its own story. It would be impossible to report on all the work that is currently going on in this report. To give you an idea of the scope of this work, take a look at the following list of countries where WELS World Missions conducts, partners, supports, or encourages gospel outreach.

World Missions partners and missions

*Countries where missionaries reside.

Africa

Mission partners

- Cameroon
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Malawi*
- Nigeria
- Zambia*

Exploratory mission work

- Burundi
- DRO Congo
- Liberia
- Mozambique
- Rwanda
- South Sudan
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- Zimbabwe

Asia

Mission partners

- Australia
- India
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Philippines
- Thailand*
- Vietnam

Exploratory mission work

- Bangladesh

East Asia

Mission partners

- China
- Hong Kong*
- Japan
- South Korea
- Taiwan

Europe

Mission partners

- Albania
- Bulgaria
- Czech Republic
- Finland

- Germany
- Latvia
- Norway
- Portugal
- Russia*
- Sweden
- Ukraine

Latin America

Mission partners

- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Chile
- Colombia
- Dominican Republic
- Haiti
- Mexico
- Peru
- Puerto Rico

Exploratory mission work

- Argentina
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Ecuador*
- Nicaragua
- Paraguay*
- Venezuela

North America

Mission partners

- Apache Reservation*

Every aspect of the work our mission teams carry out in so many ways and so many places is worthy of note. Summaries of this work can be found at wels.net/missions.

Information concerning independent sister churches who receive specialized help from WELS can also be found in the report of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (p. 13). Notice the gospel work that WELS encourages through our worldwide fellowship with the church bodies in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC).

Highlights

The mission teams that WELS supports are divided into six regions. Each team is made up of full-time missionaries and administrative calling bodies that reside in the United States. These teams meet with leaders from the Board for World Missions for yearly planning to consider changing needs and ongoing support of our local ministry partners. These teams also connect the mission resources available through Multi-Language Productions and the joint mission work of the Pastoral Studies Institute based at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. What follows are some highlights from each region.

Africa

This summer will see the end of the school years in the joint worker training program of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. That means that men from Zambia and Malawi will be graduating from the seminary and presented as candidates for ministry in the local synods. It also means that the three years of training at the Bible Institute in Malawi are completed and those students will move to Zambia to continue seminary training. Visits to Cameroon and Nigeria have come to a standstill as local security situations have prevented any travel. The churches in Ethiopia and Kenya have given a huge boost to the training of Nuer men from refugee camps as well as training men for the local synods. Outreach work by our team of missionaries has continued to visit several new contacts in Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Asia

The work for this newly formed team covers much ground. This area of the world is in great need of the gospel, but local governments often make the work of foreign missionaries quite difficult. This is one reason that we do not have many foreign missionaries that are able to reside within several of these countries. The team has chosen Chiang Mai, Thailand, to serve as a hub for regional mission work. From this location WELS hopes to continue to support the worker training programs in the Asian countries noted previously and continue to explore opportunities for the gospel where there is so much darkness.

East Asia

Our residential foreign mission work in support of local pastors was increasingly putting those local partners at risk. With the maturity of the local churches and the danger to local leaders, WELS World Missions has relocated our WELS support workers to Thailand. The work in Hong Kong at Asia Lutheran Seminary continues as does our mentoring and advanced training of East Asian pastors from the new mission hub in Thailand. This team continues to partner with local synods in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the mainland to spread the gospel where rules and laws intended to limit that spread exist. As is often the case throughout the history of our Lord's Church, house churches continue to grow.

Europe

Our WELS missionary to Europe continues to partner with mature synods to explore new opportunities for gospel outreach as well as to support worker training programs that benefit the local churches. Outreach work with the Roma people in Bulgaria and across several borders continues. There are also plans underway to explore opening a mission in the London area of the United Kingdom.

Latin America

New church planters are being visited in Paraguay, Argentina, Ecuador, Cuba, and Venezuela. Most of these contacts have come through the online efforts of *Academia Cristo*. This platform provides training, worship, and outreach materials and is connected to more than 2 million Facebook users each week and 50,000 weekly visits to the web page for materials and classes. This platform also is strengthening ties between our Latin American churches and Hispanic workers and members in our WELS churches in the United States.

Native America

The Apache grade schools in Peridot and East Fork and the high school in East Fork are thriving, and enrollments are maxed. The Apache Christian Training School is working to add even more Apache workers to these gospel efforts. Plans are underway to reach out to other Native American tribes. The connections from one tribe to another present an opportunity for outreach that our Apache partners are able to explore that are not available to outsiders.

Multi-Language Productions

Multi-Language Publications changed its name to Multi-Language Productions to reflect the changing world in which we strive to share the gospel. Almost all material produced is now shared in a digital format. The need for recordings, videos, and interactive online connections are all present realities. Multi-Language Productions has launched an app in English and Spanish that allows students to take the first level of self-guided courses. Once they have passed through those classes, our mission team contacts those students to invite them to classes with a live teacher. The goal is to train them to use the material they are learning to plant a house church where they are at. When ready, our missionaries can visit to offer mentoring and support in these new locations around the world.

COVID-19

This spring our worldwide fellowship has been adjusting to the new realities of stay-at-home orders and rules that do not allow large gatherings for worship. Travel for our missionaries and teams has come to a standstill. We know that in the Lord's hands this will work for the good of his Church in this world. By God's grace, at the time of this writing, all our missionaries are safe in their locations all around the world. It is a testament to God's Spirit in our missionaries' hearts that they continue to cherish their calls to serve in this and all challenges for the sake of our Lord and his commission to share the Good News with a world which would die without it.

A look ahead

The number of people on this planet who need to hear about the love of the Savior God who came into this world to save them is growing. More than 6.5 billion people need what we already have. Without the gospel message, they will be lost for eternity.

Online contacts are booming, and we are working to connect people with online communities that provide a more complete understanding of the Bible. These people are planting churches. Church bodies in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference provide additional contacts to explore. The Board for World Missions also serves as the World Missions exploration arm of WELS. There are efforts to plant churches underway in Argentina, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Venezuela, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and the Navajo, Sioux, and Mescalero Native American tribes.

God's grace has opened doors to an unprecedented mission opportunity in communist Vietnam. WELS has been invited by the government to work with the Hmong in Vietnam. The Lord is opening a door to reach the more than two million Hmong people who live in Vietnam and the surrounding countries. Until these recent WELS efforts this church was left out of any formal training opportunities as a minority group in Vietnam. With special thanks to our Lord, we recognize the gifts of God's people in WELS who met the goals of a special offering to build the training center in Hanoi. Ground should be breaking this summer on the new building. This will provide a steady location for the training that has been ongoing for three years.

The WELS Board for World Missions is excited to continue to partner with WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations. Our connections to these sister churches are an invaluable resource to WELS' cross-cultural efforts. It is also an opportunity for WELS to use our brotherly support to enhance outreach efforts that we could never carry out on our own.

This summer was supposed to highlight the triennial meeting of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference in South Korea. Those plans have been put on hold for one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Your World Missions team treasures the ongoing support of the members of WELS. Your prayers, attention, and gifts allow us to carry out the witnessing work the Lord has given to us all. May the Lord bless our work together as we hear his calling and take the treasure of Christ's love to share it with a world that will be lost without it.

Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, reporter

Rev. Paul Janke, chairman

Teacher Chris Pluger, secretary

Mr. Arlin Bornschlegl

Rev. Glen Hieb

Mr. Mark Schulz

Advisory:

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

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Mr. Sean Young, director of WELS Missions Operations

Joint Mission Council

Our calling

WELS Joint Missions supports mission opportunities that are the responsibility of Home Missions, World Missions, and Ministerial Education. Much of this work centers around people group ministries, where immigrants who have joined our fellowship in the United States and Canada are able to take the gospel back to friends and family in their country of origin. The Joint Mission Council (JMC) administers the work of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) and assists in other cross-cultural outreach efforts and new programs like WELS Mission Journeys.

Coordination and cooperation are helpful to all of WELS and the church bodies in our fellowship. Since the gospel is for all people, we want to reach everyone, even if it is difficult, and the Joint Mission Council is proactively looking for opportunities to make connections by being flexible in structure.

Our current situation

Pastoral Studies Institute

The Pastoral Studies Institute Team of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary facilitates much of the work of the Joint Mission Council. Prof. Jon Bare, Prof. Brad Wordell, and Prof. E. Allen Sorum are the three men who 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 consults in four main ways:

1. Collaboration with the One Africa Team and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa to offer degrees from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to pastors in our sister church bodies (either Bachelors of Theology or Bachelors of Divinity).
2. Collaboration with the Global South Sudanese Committee and national churches in Kenya and Ethiopia for the training of Nuer pastors in refugee camps in those countries.
3. Collaboration with the One Africa Team on joint vetting projects such as Liberia where Pastoral Studies Institute students have connected us to church bodies that are now seeking training and fellowship.
4. Consultation with One Africa Team and the Lutheran Church in Mission for Christ–Kenya on the training and continuing education of pastors.

In Asia, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team coordinates an annual continuing education seminar for the pastors of the church body of our fellowship in Indonesia. The 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.

In Latin America, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team has been asked to be part of an ad hoc committee with the One Latin America Team members to determine the partners, the structure, and the program for an online seminary for all of Latin America.

In Europe, Pastoral Studies Institute Team members have been teaching in Russia, providing seminary training for a Russian man in Novosibirsk, continuing education for four of the pastors in Russia, and Masters in Sacred Theology course work to our missionary in Russia. Team members recently began working with a Lutheran pastor seeking partnership with our sister church body in Russia. In Bulgaria, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team works with Roma (Gypsy) outreach sites.

In North America, the Pastoral Studies Institute Team continues to train immigrants to the U.S. for service to their local people group. Eighteen such men are currently enrolled in the program and are committed to completing the Pastoral Studies Institute training program. In addition, the formation of an Urban Advisory Board is helping efforts to train urban black men for local urban black ministry in Milwaukee.

People group committees

The Joint Mission Council has formed the Global South Sudanese Committee so that South Sudanese immigrants of our fellowship can take administrative responsibility for outreach to Nuer-speakers in the U.S. and abroad. The Joint Mission Council has also formed the Global Hmong Committee so that Hmong immigrants of our fellowship can take administrative responsibility for outreach to Hmong speakers. When Spanish-speaking immigrants are interested in similar efforts, the Board for World Missions' One Latin America Team has been handling those arrangements, but the Joint Mission Council has recently begun exploring forming people group committees of Spanish-speaking WELS members based on their countries of origin.

Mission Journeys

WELS Mission Journeys, the official WELS program for short-term mission trips, provides an opportunity for all WELS members to walk together in the Great Commission. Through church- or school-based volunteer trips to WELS mission fields at home and abroad, members have the opportunity to engage in Christian service. Pre-trip training led by a congregational team leader equips volunteers to have significant impact during their trip. While volunteering, the learning and sharing of outreach ideas allows teams to explore how they can use their God-given abilities to lead an outreach event upon their return home. With the Lord's blessing, these trips will inspire a lifelong journey of service and outreach for all who volunteer.

Individual efforts

The Joint Mission Council has identified people from Bangladesh, China, Colombia, Cuba, India, Korea, Liberia,

Pakistan, Vietnam, and other countries who have interest and training to take the gospel to their own people groups here in the United States and in their countries of origin.

An International Friendship Center was opened at Christ, Pewaukee, Wis., to reach out to the South Asian population that resides in the area. Pastor Paul, a Pakistani man who relocated to the U.S. due to security concerns, leads this ministry. Small group Bible studies, family fun nights, driver's education classes, and English classes are just a few of the ways they reach out in love to their community.

Opportunities seem to arise daily for us to take the gospel to all nations.

Rev. Paul Prange, reporter

Rev. Paul Prange, chairman

Rev. John Bortulin, secretary

Teacher Arlin Bornschlegl, representative of WELS Board for World Missions

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions

Rev. Paul Janke, chairman of WELS Board for World Missions

Mr. Thomas Metzger, representative of WELS Board for Home Missions

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

Rev. Earle Treptow, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions

Mr. Sean Young, director of WELS Missions Operations

Board for Ministerial Education

Our calling

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

The scriptural purpose of our ministerial education program is the preparation of candidates for the public ministry of the gospel to proclaim Christ’s love in the congregations, schools, and mission fields of our fellowship. The schools 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, Mequon, Wis., offers an excellent theological training program for men who intend to enter the pastoral ministry of WELS. It serves both first-career and second-career students. It began the year with 121 enrolled. Recently the Board for Ministerial Education appointed a task force to suggest improvements in the recruitment, training, and support of second-career students. Grow in Grace, the institute for pastoral growth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, has significantly expanded opportunities for the theological and professional growth of called workers already serving in the ministry of our confessional fellowship. Efforts to improve the resignation rate for new pastors in WELS through a mentoring program have been blessed with a significant reduction of that rate, a special blessing in this era of high pastoral vacancy rates. For the sake of its domestic programs of continuing education, and to offer support for our sister schools overseas, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has taken the first step in the process of accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools. The seminary has also begun a strategic planning process that will guide them in determining ministry priorities and potential campus improvements like expanded classroom facilities. More information is available at wisluthsem.org, which is a new website address.

Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., is the WELS College of Ministry. It trains a corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified to meet the ministry needs of WELS and who are competent to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions. Martin Luther College began the second semester of the 2019–20 school year with 698 undergraduates, 497 in the education track, 176 in the preseminary track, and 13 in the staff ministry track, representing 33 states and 6 countries. One thousand one hundred forty three students were enrolled in continuing education and graduate studies programs. To celebrate the silver anniversary of the college, the synod is conducting a campaign called “Equipping Christian Witnesses,” which includes special efforts in the areas of recruitment, financial assistance, and facilities. The new president of Martin Luther College, Prof. Richard Gurgel, begins his duties on July 1, 2020. We thank outgoing President Mark Zarling for his years of faithful service. More information is available 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 Lutheran Seminary receives grants from the MLS Foundation, including financial assistance and sponsorship of capital improvements. Michigan Lutheran Seminary began the year with 196 students. More information is available 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 402 students. More information is available at lps.wels.net.

Coronavirus

The disruptions to the onsite delivery of instruction caused by the worldwide pandemic in early 2020 demonstrated the resilience of faculty, students, and staff, as online classes were quickly established, and routine maintenance projects normally done in the summer were moved into the time frame that students were not on campus. God's blessing of stable financial situations at our domestic schools allowed them the flexibility to make sound decisions during that uncertain time.

Finances

The Board for Ministerial Education (BME) 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 schools. Martin Luther College continues its efforts to address the educational debt of its graduates. The college has established programs to train students in good stewardship and to increase funds available for student assistance. "Equipping Christian Witnesses" addresses student educational debt with its second pillar. The Congregational Partner Grant Program provides matching funds for tuition assistance provided by congregations to students who attend Martin Luther College. In most cases this assistance is given in addition to any other financial assistance the student might receive.

Vacancy rates

Parish pastor vacancies in WELS stabilized in 2018 but are still over 100. The average size of the graduating classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is projected to increase in 2023. Vacancies in principal and early childhood director positions remain difficult to fill. The trends that caused those vacancy rates have been addressed. Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School are seeing increasing numbers of their graduates entering the preseminary course at Martin Luther College. The 21st-Century Lutheran Principal Initiative, approved by the 2017 synod convention, is a process to recruit and fully train experienced teachers to serve as principals, and should help with the principal vacancy rate. A similar program is being considered for early childhood directors.

Capital projects

Capital campaigns for buildings at the schools are conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Christian Giving, reviewed and adopted as a regular part of WELS' ministry planning process. The Conference of Presidents has approved the "Equipping Christian Witnesses" partnership of Martin Luther College and the Ministry of Christian Giving in 2019–21. That campaign is underway. Congregations are encouraged to participate.

The synod in convention has established a Capital Projects Committee to work on the long-range capital plans of the ministerial education schools. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is improving the interior circle area by the dormitories as well as restrooms in the academic area. It is adding an 18th faculty home for its 18th faculty family. A look at WLS classroom facilities is underway. Martin Luther College is improving its student housing even as it embarks on a capital campaign with goals in student housing and student athletic facilities. Michigan Lutheran Seminary is improving its athletic facilities with new outdoor bleachers, restrooms, and a press box with funding provided by the MLS Foundation. Luther Preparatory School has received permission to investigate building a new music auditorium. The Lord gives us our daily bread, and we are grateful that the campuses are well maintained, with very few immediate projects unfunded in the ministry plan for the current biennium.

For more information on capital projects, see p. 49.

Partnerships

With the blessing and encouragement of Home and World Missions administrations, the ministerial education schools are establishing increasingly close partnerships with the world mission fields and self-supporting churches in our fellowship in order to help develop their particular ministerial education programs. In the past few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in requests to the Pastoral Studies Institute at 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 and the Commission on Inter-Church Relations detail some of those efforts.

Our domestic ministerial education schools have seen some success in their plan to increase the numbers of underrepresented minorities on their campuses and in their programs. A special emphasis in the next biennium is the strengthening of our partnerships with the congregations serving urban Wisconsin populations that are using Parental Choice vouchers to enroll in their Lutheran elementary schools. The rapid expansion of the schools using this model has strained their ability to staff their classrooms with ministry-certified teachers, especially black and Hispanic men and women, who are trained to work with students living in poverty.

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 anywhere that the Church needs them. It's an extraordinary blessing that they believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God, treasure the precious Lutheran heritage of proclaiming the unconditional gospel that has been passed to our generation with remarkable clarity, and present themselves for service as faithful ministers of the gospel who subscribe without reservation to the Lutheran Confessions. 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.

Rev. Paul Prange, reporter

Rev. Duane A. Rodewald, chairman

Rev. John P. Bortulin, secretary

Rev. Gregory Gibbons

Mr. Paul Hahm

Mr. Kyle Koltz

Teacher Daniel Markgraf

Teacher Kurt Rosenbaum

Rev. Jonathan Scharf

Mr. Brian Scheele

Rev. Timothy Spaude

Mr. Dean Waldschmidt

Rev. Michael Woldt

Teacher Gerald Zeamer

Advisory:

Pres. Matthew Crass, Luther Preparatory School

Pres. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president

Pres. Earle Treptow, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Pres. Mark Zarling, Martin Luther College

Appendix:

Martin Luther College's philosophy of financial assistance and student indebtedness

WE ARE GRATEFUL. Martin Luther College (MLC) is deeply grateful for the continued support of WELS. The WELS operating subsidy, which comes from WELS Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO), funds about 17 percent of MLC's budget. We are also grateful for the gifts that come directly to MLC from foundations and individuals within WELS.

The blessing of this subsidy and these gifts, coupled with careful stewardship by the MLC Governing Board and administration, allows MLC to keep costs relatively low without sacrificing quality in our educational offerings or the student-life experience on campus. MLC regularly ranks at or near the top of "Best Value" college lists, and the average debt for MLC graduates is several thousand dollars below the national average for graduates of other four-year private colleges.

WE ARE CONCERNED. Though our student debt figure runs lower than average, it is still a considerable cause for concern and prayer. About 75 percent of MLC students graduate with debt. The debt for that 75 percent averages \$27,000. If two of our graduates marry, the debt can double. Many of our graduates, therefore, enter their public ministries with a challenging burden—a burden exacerbated by the lower lifetime earning potential of called workers compared to college graduates in other fields.

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

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

WE ARE RESPONDING. To reduce the debt load of our graduates and to assure that nothing hampers the recruiting of future gospel ministers, the MLC Governing Board and administration invite all our partners throughout the synod to join us in addressing this challenge as wisely and aggressively as possible. Under God’s blessing, we seek to:

- **Increase gifts to financial aid.**

We will cultivate even more generous foundation grants, individual gifts, and special congregational contributions, such as those facilitated by the Congregational Partner Grant Program. Such grants and gifts will significantly increase our ability to award merit-based and especially need-based financial aid, allowing us to offer more competitive financial aid packages to prospective students.

- **Enhance student financial literacy.**

We will expand the current excellent program that teaches students wise stewardship of their financial resources. The MLC program, established before it was common practice at other college campuses, offers students guidance about summer employment, limiting working hours during the academic semesters, and sensible budgeting in a consumermentality culture. Recent research by the Trellis Company confirms the positive impact of financial counseling, and all such growth provides a blessing long after graduation.

- **Encourage family financial support.**

We will encourage parents to help fund their children’s college education in ways consistent with their resources. In a growing trend, more parents are asking their children to bear an increasing percentage of college costs. While having students contribute to their college education does foster maturity, parents might not realize that student employment comes nowhere close to covering the full cost of college and that government support has shifted almost entirely from grants to loans. When parents help pay for college, they provide a double blessing: reducing their children’s debt load and assisting their children to make a stronger beginning in public ministry.

- **Urge students to utilize government loans judiciously.**

We will help students evaluate the long-term ramifications of student loans so that they don’t borrow too quickly or carelessly. We will also assist them with quick loan repayment options. When we combine greater financial literacy with increased financial aid and additional parental support, we will be well on our way toward fewer and smaller student loans.

OUR GOAL: Under God’s blessing, we would like to cut student indebtedness in half in 10 years. The current ratio of debt to starting salary is 92 percent¹. The goal is to reduce that ratio to 46 percent in 10 years.

In 2020 dollars, a \$1,500 per year increase in each of three areas—student contribution, family contribution, and financial aid—would result in an \$18,000 decrease in the average debt over four years. That would more than meet this goal! The challenge is not as significant as it may first appear.

In this, as in all things, we ask God to help us. May our efforts ease the financial burden our graduates carry, remove hindrances to ministry recruitment, and raise an ever larger corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified to meet WELS ministry needs.

¹ This ratio lists the average indebtedness of the 2019 Martin Luther College graduate (\$27,196) as a percentage of the 2019–20 WELS salary matrix column C with 0 years of experience (\$29,511).

Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans

A number of subsidiary groups and one affiliate 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

Our calling

At the time this synodical report is being written, the entire country and whole world are in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. As news daily goes from bad to worse, an appropriate way to begin this report on the work of the WELS Historical Institute is to go back in time to the words of Hosea 6:1,2: "Come, let us return to the LORD. For he has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us. He has struck us, but he will bandage our wounds. After two days he will revive us. On the third day he will raise us up, so that we may live in his presence" (EHV).

The WELS Historical Institute exists to further the kingdom of God on this earth by communicating in an interesting and winsome way the history of the Wisconsin Synod. The institute had its first meeting on Oct. 28, 1981, at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. About a year later, the 1863 church building of Salem Lutheran Church, 107th St. and Fond du Lac Avenue, Milwaukee, was designated as the official WELS museum. The constituting convention of WELS was held in a log church nearly adjacent to the later 1863 building on Trinity Sunday, May 26, 1850, one hundred-seventy years ago. Both the log church and the first synod convention are remembered today by an official Wisconsin state historical marker near the actual site where it all began.

The institute's bylaws outline the scope of its work: 1) To promote interest in the history of WELS 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 Lutheran Landmark Church and Museum.

The work of the WELS Historical Institute is under the authority and supervision of the Synodical Council. The institute does not receive any funds directly from the synod. We are a self-funded organization; we are entirely dependent on membership dues, gifts, and memorials provided by our constituency and friends to fund our ongoing work.

Our current situation

The most significant, long-term challenge of the WELS Historical Institute is maintaining a viable membership base so that membership dues are able to fund the lion's share of work of the institute. The board of directors continues to recruit interested individuals to become members of the institute and to offer themselves in service to the organization. We are reaching out to the younger generations of WELS members via Facebook to take an interest in synodical history and the work of the institute. Our Facebook page has received hundreds of "likes" since it went online. We are happy to report that from 2019 to 2020 there has been a slight increase in membership.

There are many highlights of our work in 2019. Approximately a dozen tours of the Landmark Church are given each year by docents Mr. Steve Miller and Dr. Joel Pless. Tours begin in early spring and last year extended into December. The tours most often include groups from WELS congregations, schools, and organizations but also include interested individuals and families.

Since its founding, the WELS Historical Institute has endeavored to offer annual lectures and presentations that are of interest to WELS members and the general public. A tour of West Granville Cemetery by Lutheran elementary school

teacher James Moeller was held this past June. Retired teacher Carl Nolte presented “Great Hymns of Faith—From the Early Christian Church to the Reformation” in August; Prof. Joel Otto of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary gave a presentation on home mission expansion in September; in October, Dr. Mark Braun of Wisconsin Lutheran College presented the interesting content of a hundred-year-old book, *Little Journeys with Martin Luther*. Pastor Ben Schaefer of Redding, Calif., presented the paper: “Avoiding the Hornet’s Nest: Woman Suffrage and Synodical Conference Lutherans” at the annual meeting of the institute on Oct. 13, 2019, held at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. This was the first time in the institute’s history that an annual meeting presentation was streamed online.

The *WELS Historical Institute Journal* has been published semi-annually since the institute’s founding. Prof. John Brenner of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary continues to be the editor of both the journal and the semi-annual newsletter of the institute. Past issues of the journal are available online at wels.net/wels-history.

The annual meeting of the WELS Historical Institute regularly features a presentation on either WELS or Lutheran history. The 2020 annual meeting, God willing, will be held on Sunday, October 11, at 3:00 p.m. Dr. Joel Pless of Wisconsin Lutheran College will give a presentation on the ill-fated 1619 sailing expedition of Danish Lutherans to the New World in search of the storied Northwest Passage in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Lutherans in North America.

A look ahead

The WELS Historical Institute continues to assume responsibility in maintaining Salem Lutheran Landmark Church as the official WELS museum. The 1863 building is amicably leased from Salem Ev. Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, by the institute for a nominal fee of \$1.00 per year. The extended goal is to have the Landmark Church completely refurbished back to its 1863 appearance by the time the WELS celebrates the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Lutheran Church on June 25, 2030.

There are also significant updates regarding refurbishing the interior of “Old Salem.” Shortly before the church roof was replaced in 2018, rainwater seeped in and did some damage to the newly refurbished west wall in the balcony. We are happy to report that this water damage was properly repaired last year.

But there is also less happy news. With deepest regret, the board of directors decided at their February 2020 meeting to redirect all funds that had prayerfully been given to “The Little Schoolhouse in the Woods” project to help finance an immediate need. The pressing need is to waterproof the basement of Salem while collaterally upgrading the building’s electrical system. Once there were high aspirations among the institute’s constituency for WELS elementary school classes to come to Salem and participate in a 19th-century one-room school experience for a day. Sadly, for various reasons this project never came to fruition. If there is increased interest in this schoolhouse idea in the future, the board will revisit it, but for the immediate future, the board has decided to defund the project.

In addition to the waterproofing and electrical upgrade project, quoted to cost \$11,405, the 1863 church has other maintenance needs. The building’s furnaces date back to the 1980s and are nearing the end of their lives; tuck-pointing needs to be done on the exterior; and finish work needs to be done on the bell tower. Contributions large and small are needed and appreciated to keep Salem Lutheran Landmark Church in good repair and usable as the synod’s official museum.

The financial operations of the WELS Historical Institute have now been transferred to the accounting office at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry under the able tutelage of Mr. Ryan Haines, the elected treasurer of the institute. This has proven to be a wise decision on many different levels. The institute’s accounts remain in good hands. The process of the renewal of memberships and the receiving and acknowledging of contributions to the institute has also been improved. The board of directors will continue to effectively manage the institute’s finances and will continue to approve all bills. Currently, the board is considering a request from the WELS accounting office to align the fiscal year of the institute with that of the rest of the synod.

At its 2018 annual meeting, at the request of the synod and upon the recommendation of the board of directors, the WELS Historical Institute adopted a revised constitution, which enabled the institute to be more in line with synodical nomenclature, procedures, and terms of service. In order to be completely transparent and above board, and to effectively convey the content of the revision to the institute’s membership, the board decided to either e-mail or postal mail the revised constitution to the membership about a month before the 2019 annual meeting, where it was then formally adopted for a second time.

WELS congregations, schools, organizations, and individuals have a standing invitation from the institute to tour the Landmark Church and its grounds. Normally tours are conducted from April through November, although special arrangements can be made for out-of-town guests. To arrange a tour, contact Dr. Joel Pless at 414-443-8930 (office), 262-677-2109 (home), or joel.pless@wlc.edu.

There is also a standing invitation to attend the educational events that the institute sponsors. Tentatively, subject to change of course because of the current COVID-19 pandemic, there is another tour of West Granville Cemetery planned for Saturday, June 13, 9:30 a.m. by Teacher James Moeller. Teacher Carl Nolte is scheduled to present “Great Hymns of Faith from after the Reformation to the Present” on Saturday, June 27, 2020, 10:00 a.m., at Salem. Pastor Nathaniel Biebert is scheduled to give the presentation “Lutherans in Marquette County—Part 1: Origins” at Emmanuel, Montello, Wis., on Monday, July 20, 2020, 7:00 p.m. The institute will timely communicate in various ways to the synodical constituency whether these events can be responsibly and safely held.

The institute has also planned a bus tour to various WELS sites in Jefferson County, Wis., scheduled tentatively as an all-day event on Friday, August 7, 2020. Current plans are to meet in the parking lot at Christ, Pewaukee, at 8:00 a.m., and then to travel by chartered motor coach to several churches in Jefferson County, with a catered lunch at St. John, Jefferson, finishing with a tour of Luther Preparatory School. New this year is online registration at **wels.net/bus-tour**.

If you have a deep interest and love of WELS history, if you preferably reside within driving distance of the Milwaukee area, and are willing to devote time, wisdom, energy, and resources for the promotion of WELS and Lutheran history, contact one of the officers of the WELS Historical Institute. Board and voting membership is open to both men and women who are active members of a WELS congregation. The board of directors meets four times a year to oversee the work of the institute and to provide general governance. Board meetings are normally held in February, April, September, and October. The October meeting is a brief organizational gathering after the annual meeting.

Besides committed board members, what the institute really needs the most in regard to human resources are new members. The membership fees have not been increased in about a decade and currently the board is reviewing the prospect of increasing the price to help pay current expenses. Even if the board feels the need to increase fees, membership in the institute will remain a great value. Members receive semi-annually both the *WELS Historical Institute Journal* and a newsletter, in addition to receiving invitations to attend various events and presentations throughout the course of the year, not to mention the joy of preserving and telling the history of WELS. For information on becoming a member of the WELS Historical Institute and participating in its historical preservation work, visit **wels.net/wels-history**.

Finally, the board of directors of the WELS Historical Institute wish to direct the attention of the members of our synod to some significant church history anniversaries happening in 2020. This year is the 500th anniversary of three significant Reformation-era documents written by Martin Luther in 1520: *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (August), *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (October), and *The Freedom of a Christian* (November). The 500th anniversary of Luther’s courageous stand at the Diet of Worms before Emperor Charles V will be Sunday, April 18, 2021.

At the time of the writing of this update, there is much despair and uncertainty in this world as a result of the global pandemic. Let the readers of this update take heart that the first Lutherans of the sixteenth century had their share, and more than their share, of experiencing pestilence and economic uncertainty. Martin Luther responded to his threatening times by finding his center, his comfort, and his strength in the never-changing truths of God’s Word. He based his famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” on the words of Psalm 46. As we responsibly continue the work of the WELS Historical Institute, we too will go forward strengthened with this resolve from Psalm 46:1: “God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble” (EHV).

Dr. Joel Pless, reporter

Dr. Joel Pless, chairman

Mr. Daniel Nommensen, vice chairman

Mrs. Naomi Plocher, secretary

Mr. Ryan Haines, treasurer

Rev. David Dolan

Mr. Steve Miller

Mr. Carl Nolte
Prof. Joel Otto
Rev. Benjamin Schaefer
Rev. William Schaefer
Rev. Robert Weiss

Advisory:

Prof. John Brenner, editor, *WELS Historical Institute Journal*
Mrs. Amanda Raabe, co-designer and curator
Ms. Charlotte Sampe, co-designer and curator
Mrs. Susan Willems, WELS archivist

WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.

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 congregation projects under the direction of the Board for Home Missions and loans to mission-minded self-supporting congregations so that they can acquire parsonages, land, and facilities as tools for gospel outreach.

Our current situation

Church Extension Fund funding to carry out our mission comes primarily from three sources: member investments, operating revenue, and gifts and bequests. Individual members, congregations, and affiliates of WELS may invest in CEF certificates and savings accounts. As of March 2020, 3,220 investors have entrusted CEF with more than \$97.7 million. Total investment dollars grew by 4.9 percent this past year. These member investments provide funds for the Loan Program. Net revenues from operations and gifts and bequests made to CEF provide funding for the congregation Grant Program.

Loan Program

The CEF loan portfolio continues to grow and is now at 218 loans with dollars outstanding of \$176.1 million, which is almost a 13 percent increase since our last report in 2018. Currently 23 congregations are in the construction process with \$37.2 million yet to disburse to complete those projects. The new loan application pipeline has slowed considerably from 2019 levels and we are expecting a slower than normal end to FY2020 and a slow start to FY2021. CEF's lending rate structure is published annually in our Offering Circular—presently, our lending rate for new loans is 4.99 percent. "Mission" status congregations receive a 0.25 percent reduction of the lending rate for their initial 5-year note.

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 purchases, or new facility construction projects. A congregation's down payment combined with a CEF matching grant allows the mission congregation to move forward with a more manageable loan payment. Matching grants totaling more than \$2.6 million for nine congregational grants have been approved through February of FY2020. We anticipate up to \$.13 million of additional grant approvals to 1 congregation by the end of the fiscal year. Since 1993, nearly \$40.3 million in CEF matching grants have been approved for mission congregations across North America and the West Indies.

Special grants to Home Missions

WELS CEF has distributed nearly \$7.7 million to the Board for Home Missions in the past 11 fiscal years through special grants (\$3.3 million 2009–2014) and through CEF's endowment funds (\$4.4 million since 2015).

A look ahead

We pray by God's grace that Church Extension Fund will continue to benefit from positive operational results and be able to continue to provide special grants over and above our congregation matching grant programs to assist more mission congregations and Home Missions through the endowment fund.

We anticipate that our loan portfolio will grow through the remainder of FY2020 and into the first half of FY2021. Maintaining a healthy and disciplined approach regarding operations and a fair and competitive interest rate environment for investors and borrowers is critical for CEF's financial health.

We continue to encourage individual WELS members, congregations, and affiliated organizations to consider investing in CEF loan, savings, and retirement/IRA certificates and to consider gifts and bequests to CEF to help support our mission and close partnership with Home Missions.

Please feel free to contact CEF at 1-866-511-7793 or by e-mail at cef@wels.net. Visit our website at wels.net/cef.

Mr. Scott Page, reporter

Mr. Seth Hansen, chairman

Mr. Timothy Boerneke, vice chairman

Mr. Brad Beal, secretary

Rev. Timothy Gauger

Mr. Timothy Gensmer

Mr. Mark Hartman

Mr. David Hirons

Mr. Ron Kerr

Mr. Joel Koch

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Advisory:

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Board for Home Missions

Mr. Sean Young, director of WELS Missions Operations

WELS Foundation, Inc.

Our calling

Established in 1965, WELS Foundation, Inc., is one of seven Support Services subsidiaries of WELS. The corporation 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. It is the only foundation whose purpose is to facilitate donors' desires to support synod ministries. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, WELS Foundation had the privilege to administer and distribute \$5.9 million in donor-directed gifts to various ministries throughout the synod. During the six-month period ending Dec. 31, 2019, an additional \$5.2 million was distributed.

WELS Foundation provides various giving opportunities including charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, donor advised funds, and endowment funds. It currently administers 1,200 charitable gifts on behalf of WELS members for the benefit of WELS ministries.

As of Dec. 31, 2019, the total assets were \$153.3 million with net assets of \$57.8 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 ministries (i.e., 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, 2019, WELS Foundation administered 347 endowment funds with a total market value of \$93.6 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, 2019, WELS Foundation administered 635 charitable gift annuities with a total market value of \$10.5 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, 2019, WELS Foundation served as trustee for 144 charitable remainder trusts with a combined market value of \$30.3 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, 2019, WELS Foundation administered 76 donor advised funds with a total market value of \$3.0 million.

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, agricultural crops, and other donor designated gifts.

Educational webinars

In 2019, 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, advancement officers, and congregational planned giving committee leaders.

A look ahead

WELS Communication Services has hired a marketing coordinator, who is responsible for developing and implementing communication strategies for the promotion of WELS Foundation. Strategies will include updating content on wels.net; increasing communication with WELS churches, schools, and organizations; having a presence at WELS events; creating and posting content on WELS social media platforms; and developing all marketing materials.

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 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 planned giving opportunities benefiting WELS ministries.

Mr. James Holm, reporter

Mr. Mark Maurice, chairman

Mr. Timothy Boerneke, vice chairman

Mr. Michael Brereton, secretary

Mr. Nathan Birkholz

Rev. Jonathan Kolander

Mr. Michael Krueger

Mr. Scott Neitzel

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Advisory:

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education

WELS Investment Funds, Inc.

Our calling

Established in 1997, WELS Investment Funds, Inc., is one of seven Support Services subsidiaries of WELS. The corporation shall 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 \$200 million for WELS ministries, including nearly 200 congregations. 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, institutional-priced investment opportunities that are not available to smaller investment accounts. 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 there are eight qualified directors serving on the board. The day-to day affairs are carried out by WELS employees leased to WELS Investment Funds.

The board has retained Vanguard Institutional Advisory Services as the investment consultant for WELS Investment Funds. As a co-fiduciary, Vanguard Institutional Advisory Services is responsible for making investment recommendations to the board. Once the recommendation is approved by the board, the investment consultant has the discretion to implement and oversee the investment recommendations.

WELS Investment Funds does not receive financial support from the WELS operating budget but instead charges a fee to the portfolios it manages to cover its operating expenses. Over the last 20 years, the operating expense fee has been reduced from the initial fee of 0.48 percent to the current fee of 0.18 percent. The underlying mutual fund expense ratios have also declined from more than 0.50 percent to 0.15 percent.

Additional information, including director biographical information, investment policy statement, audited financial statements, and the 2019 annual report to WELS Ministries, is available at wels.net/welsfunds.

Much has happened in the investment markets due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Uncertainty regarding coronavirus caused a rapid decline in the capital markets, putting us in a bear market for the first time since 2008. In response, WELS Investment Funds continued to monitor the WELS Funds' portfolios and, as prescribed in the investment policy statement, rebalanced the portfolios as needed. Vanguard Institutional Advisory Services, a co-fiduciary for WELS Investment Funds, provided this perspective amid the coronavirus outbreak: 1. Market downturns and bouts of volatility are not rare events. The key is understanding that these market conditions do not last forever, and recovery can happen more quickly than one might think. 2. Vanguard remains optimistic about the prospects of an economic and market recovery. Unlike the global financial recession of 2008 that was caused by excess leverage, the current challenge is not the same since the financial system is on much more solid footing. The economy will contract, but we believe the U.S. will rebound later this year and in early 2021. At the time of this writing, it is unclear what overall effects COVID-19 will have on the global economy, but we remain confident in the love and promises of our unchanging God.

A look ahead

WELS Communication Services has hired a marketing coordinator, who is responsible for developing and implementing communication strategies for the promotion of WELS Investment Funds. Strategies will include updating content on wels.net; increasing communication with WELS churches, schools, and organizations; having a presence at WELS events; creating and posting content on WELS social media platforms; and developing all marketing materials.

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, either in person or via conference call, contact us at 414-256-3206 or jim.holm@wels.net.

Mr. James Holm, reporter

Directors:

Mr. Dennis Walters, chairman

Mr. Joel Luehmann, vice chairman

Mr. John Wenker, secretary

Rev. Charles Degner

Mr. Seth Hansen

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Mr. Ronald Schmitz

Mr. Max Wenck

Advisory:

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving

WELS Benefit Plans

Our calling

The WELS Benefit Plans Office serves synodical workers and organizations through the administration of the WELS Voluntary Employee Benefits Association (VEBA), the WELS Pension Plan, and the WELS Shepherd Plan. Oversight of each plan is the responsibility of separate commissions appointed by the WELS Synodical Council. Each commission is composed of four laymen, a pastor, and a male teacher from the called worker roster. 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

Detailed information regarding the WELS VEBA, Pension, and Shepherd Plans, including financial performance and results through Dec, 31, 2019, is available in the 2019 WELS Benefit Plans Annual Report, which can be found at wels.net/rttd2020.

During 2020, much of the efforts of the WELS VEBA and Retirement Program Commissions have been dedicated to responding to the national public health emergency. In recognition of the unexpected financial challenges experienced by many calling bodies, the VEBA Commission approved a premium holiday for WELS VEBA medical benefits for the month of August 2020, and the Retirement Program Commission approved a contribution holiday for the WELS Pension Plan for the October through December 2020 quarter. In total, these rate holidays will provide more than \$9 million in relief to calling bodies, while maintaining the long-term financial viability of each plan.

In addition, the commissions have amended the VEBA and Shepherd Plans to provide enhanced benefits, greater access to health care, and increased flexibility for participants while remaining compliant with applicable law. The VEBA Plan was amended to cover eligible costs at 100 percent to diagnose COVID-19 and treat plan members who are diagnosed with COVID-19, as well as to cover eligible costs for telehealth consultations with health care providers, for a limited time as determined by the VEBA Commission. The Shepherd Plan was amended to allow participants to waive their Required Minimum Distributions to be paid in 2020.

Finally, although not directly related to the national public health emergency, the ongoing administration fee paid by Shepherd Plan participants was reduced by 20 percent effective Jan. 1, 2020, preserving assets in participants' accounts for their future needs.

The commissions are grateful that the Lord has blessed the benefit plans with the financial flexibility to provide these relief measures to calling bodies and benefit enhancements to participants during this unprecedented time.

Additional information is available at welsbpo.net.

Mr. Joshua Peterman, reporter

WELS VEBA Commission:

Mr. Charles Adrian, chairman

Mr. Jon Wirkkula, vice chairman

Mr. Robert Bullens, secretary

Teacher Douglas Dast

Mr. Kyle Koltz

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Rev. Joel Sauer

Advisory:

Ms. Christine Hitter, membership manager

Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of Benefit Plans
Ms. Lori Schrank, claims manager

WELS Retirement Program Commission:

Mr. David McCulloch, chairman
Mr. Thomas Medema, vice chairman
Mr. James Brenn, secretary
Mr. James Hahm
Rev. Philip Hoyer
Mr. Lee Miller
Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Advisory:

Ms. Christine Hitter, membership manager
Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of Benefit Plans

Northwestern Publishing House

Our calling

The WELS constitution indicates, “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.”

The mission of Northwestern Publishing House is to deliver biblically sound, Christ-centered resources within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and beyond. For 129 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 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 materials we make available.

Our current situation

Office location

Northwestern Publishing House has been in its new home at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry for a little over a year. Employees are settled in and working diligently on a number of exciting new projects. The new office location is proving to be a benefit in encouraging collaboration with various areas of ministry. With the office move and other transitions, the ministry of NPH is now, God willing, positioned for sustained service to the Church and for fulfillment of the synod’s objective of publishing literature that maintains our Lutheran doctrine and practice.

Publishing program

NPH continues to focus on developing resources that we pray will benefit those we serve. In the last year, NPH published three books for layperson growth, one book on Lutheran doctrine, one book on apologetics, one vacation Bible school course, two youth curriculum resources, a Bible story book for children, two worship resources, fifteen sheet music titles, and the WELS Yearbook. NPH also introduced four new Bible studies to support approaches that are becoming increasingly relevant to our churches today: corporate, small group, women’s, and individual Bible studies. In addition, NPH published the periodicals *Meditations Daily Devotional*, *Forward in Christ*, *Parents Crosslink*, and *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

Pastors, teachers, and WELS members can find a continuously expanding selection of books from NPH along with doctrinally reviewed books from other publishers, church supplies, gifts, and other materials to support their ministry and strengthen their faith, at nph.net or by calling 1-800-662-6022.

NPH continually seeks new ways to remain good financial stewards by achieving greater efficiencies and reducing printing expenses through pursuing multiple print bids, just-in-time printing of short print runs, print-on-demand, and, where appropriate, printing offshore.

Digital publishing program

NPH continues its commitment to delivering content in ways that customers consider relevant to their needs with 213 eBooks, 119 titles in Logos format, and 583 downloadable resources.

In collaboration with WELS Communications Services, extensive research was conducted regarding *Forward in Christ*, resulting in a number of exciting content and design changes along with the introduction of new digital options for readers. The digital version of *Forward in Christ* is now available at no charge with an individual print subscription. A new *Forward in Christ* website, forwardinchrist.net, was introduced to provide opportunities for greater interaction with readers. FIC e-news was also introduced to provide subscribers with weekly updates and sneak-peeks. A church introduction and encouragement effort was conducted in January through March of this year. If you have not yet done so, consider making this important ministry tool available to your church members.

The popular *Meditations Daily Devotional* app received a refresh and an update. Significantly, the app is now available on both iOS and Android platforms, expanding access to all smart phone and tablet users.

Adult Bible information course

The new *Growing in Grace: Adult Bible Information Course* was introduced as a companion to the new Luther's Small Catechism. Increasingly adopted by churches, this 18-lesson course supports pastors in teaching prospective members the six chief parts of Luther's Small Catechism. Each lesson is based on a brief account from Bible history to underscore the connection between our Lutheran doctrine and God's plan of salvation.

Adult Bible studies

Group Bible studies are taking on new and different approaches in our churches. Two areas that NPH is placing a greater focus on are small group and women's Bible studies. In conversations with our pastors, we recognize that these are growing ministry opportunities for our churches.

In this presidential election year, NPH has released a timely new Bible study by Pastor Charles Degner titled *Politics Is Driving Me Crazy*. In addition, NPH is introducing a new small group study based on the book *Civil Government* by Pastor Daniel Deutschlander. Geared toward encouraging deeper discussion and individual follow-up reflection, this small group study can be facilitated by a pastor or church leader.

NPH also introduced a new women's Bible study titled, *In God's Orchard: Cultivating the Fruit of a Spirit-Filled Life*. The Bible study is co-authored by women on the WELS Women's Ministry Committee. This trustworthy resource based on Galatians 5 can be recommended with confidence to women's Bible study groups in our churches.

To support pastors and church leaders, NPH collaborates with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and WELS Commission on Discipleship to produce the monthly *Teach the Word* e-newsletter. *Teach the Word* provides practical advice and information to help pastors and church leaders better understand adult learning and to strengthen their teaching skills. At present, there are more than 900 subscribers to *Teach the Word*. To subscribe, visit nph.net/teach-the-word.

Individual Bible study

5-Minute Bible Studies is a new series that acknowledges the reality that people today are busy and their time in God's Word is becoming increasingly compromised. Many in fact have simply stopped regular personal study. To address this trend, 5-Minute Bible Studies provide a "read anywhere" quick but thought-provoking study of God's Word. Each study includes an application, questions for reflection, and a simple yet meaningful prayer. Whether tossed in a purse, glovebox, or backpack, or at home on a nightstand or at the dinner table, 5-Minute Bible Studies deliver a realistic approach to staying in God's Word. The first in the series, *5-Minute Bible Studies for Teens*, authored by Pastor Clark Schultz is available now. *5-Minute Bible Studies for Families* will be released in September.

Communion supplies auto-ship program

An increasingly popular communion cups and wafers auto-ship service is now available for all churches. The program

provides churches with easy and automatic communion supplies replenishment. A full range of church supplies are also available for pick up at NPH's new office.

Publication Coordinating Commission

The Publication Coordinating Commission helps to subsidize publishing projects of NPH that are deemed valuable but due to limited market size would not recover the cost of production. The current balance in the Publication Coordinating Commission Fund is \$163,000. Of that amount, \$28,000 was received through a grant and is designated for development of the movie *Luther and the Diet at Worms*. Previously approved and currently under development is the book *The Scroll of Isaiah* by Dr. Seth Erlandsson. Currently being explored is *A Commentary on Mark* by Prof. Daniel Deutchlander.

Collaborative projects

NPH and several WELS commissions have enjoyed a long history of working together on joint projects, particularly in the areas of worship, adult and youth discipleship, family ministry, evangelism, and Multi-Language Productions. As Congregational Services, Multi-Language Productions, and NPH plan for future ministry, we envision many opportunities for working together.

COVID-19 impact and response

Like all ministries, NPH was impacted by COVID-19. Our first objective was to keep our called workers and employees safe and ensure they were able to effectively fulfill their responsibilities. To a person, they embraced the opportunity to serve and meet the needs of our churches and schools in creative ways. Programs immediately offered included:

- Eighty hymns from *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* were made available to download for free. Downloads from the Lent, Easter, Redeemer, Trust, Faith, Prayer, and Nation sections included digital sheet music as well as audio files of piano and organ accompaniments. They were used by both churches and members to support ongoing worship.
- *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* was offered at a 50 percent discount to enable families to purchase the hymnal for at-home use, enabling them to participate in online worship.
- Six weeks of *Christ-Light* Sunday school teachers' guides, student lessons, and activity sheets were made available to download for free. The materials were used by churches to encourage in-home instruction by parents.
- The March through June issues of *Forward in Christ* magazine were made available for free to all WELS members as a digital download, allowing them to stay in touch with the synod during a time when they did not have access to print copies through their church.

The ministry of NPH has weathered the storm. Throughout periods of uncertainty, mandated closures, and remote work, by God's grace, NPH continued to fulfill customer orders. We thank God for protecting our called workers and employees and ensuring our ministry continued through this challenging time.

A look ahead

WELS Hymnal project

Introduction of the new hymnal remains a significant project for NPH. We are now shifting focus to production of the suite of new *Christian Worship* hymnal resources planned for release in fall 2021. This spring, churches received promotional materials to help make their members aware of the new *Christian Worship* and to begin budgeting for this comprehensive suite of worship resources. For more information, visit **christianworship.com**. For additional promotional materials, call 1-800-662-6022.

Hymnology curriculum

An important worship resource for our schools is the new Hymns for Life hymnology curriculum. This 90-hymn program, tied to the new hymnal, is a complete curriculum with scope and sequence, objectives, biblical connections, and hymn background information. It also includes discussion questions, prayers, classroom and take-home activities, parent communication, and teacher devotions. The Hymns for Life curriculum is adaptable and flexible. While intended for kindergarten through eighth grade, in a three-year cycle, the levels and years can be selected to meet each school's individual situation. Year One will be available this fall. For more information, a hymn list, and samples, visit **nph.net/hymnsforlife**.

Children's hymnal

In collaboration with the Commission on Worship, NPH is evaluating the development of a children's hymnal. The children's hymnal would be primarily for nonreaders and developing readers: rich in illustration and simplified and specialized in content. The children's hymnal would provide a stepping stone for young worshipers to grow in their understanding and appreciation of family and corporate worship and to prepare them for one day using the *Christian*

Worship hymnal. In addition to serving as a resource for children to use alongside their parents in church, the children's hymnal would also support and teach worship in the classroom and encourage discussion of worship at home.

Curriculum 22:6

A large project in the early stages of evaluation and planning is a new religion curriculum for our churches and schools. The new curriculum will be developed in collaboration with a broad group of areas of ministry and will include input from educators. It will be forward-focused to address significant anticipated changes in classroom composition, teaching methodology, learning styles, and technology. To accomplish this, it will be developed independently of and not as an extension of the current *Christ-Light* curriculum. At the same time, it will remain scripturally sound and achieve the very important expectation of effectively training our children in and equipping them with God's Word. For this reason, the working title for the project is "Curriculum 22:6" in reference to Proverbs 22:6, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

Apologetics

An area of increased focus within our synod is apologetics. NPH will look for opportunities to support this effort to educate and empower our church members with a deeper understanding of God's Word and plan for salvation. As a first step, NPH recently released *Your Life Has Meaning: Discovering Your Role in an Epic Story* by Pastor Luke Thompson. This thoroughly researched and well-sourced text walks readers through the key ideas of existentialists and postmodernists along with today's voices in popular culture to let them speak for themselves and poke holes in the false sources of meaning so many chase after today. Readers are then pointed back to Jesus Christ and the true meaning he gives us.

Our thanks

One of NPH's key objectives is to help our synod's called workers combat the false doctrine and humanistic philosophy that tempts those they serve to stray from God's truth. We work diligently to support our called workers with trustworthy ministry tools that provide biblically sound, Christ-centered, and confessional Lutheran teaching. We thank the many pastors, staff ministers, and teachers who make NPH a trusted partner in their ministry.

Mr. Bill Ziche, reporter

Rev. Luke Werre, chairman

Rev. Joel Schroeder, vice chairman

Mr. Dwight Luedtke, treasurer

Mr. Christopher Snyder, secretary

Rev. Nathaniel Biebert

Mr. Matthew Groth

Prof. Brian Hennig

Mr. Jeremy Korell

Prof. Steven Pagels

Mr. Todd J. Poppe, WELS chief financial officer and treasurer

Mr. Joel Raasch

Administrative officers:

Mr. Bill Ziche, president

Rev. Curt Jahn, vice president, publishing services

Mr. Eric Krueger, vice president, finance and accounting

Committee on Constitutional Matters

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.

Our current situation

In addition to revising the document to incorporate the amendments approved by the 2019 convention, the committee has been asked to address one specific question on constitutional matters since the convention to the date of this report.

We welcome Rev. Richard Waldschmidt to the committee and ask the Lord to bless his service.

A look ahead

Soon we will review proposed bylaw changes to the synod in convention.

The current WELS Constitution and Bylaws and the Constitution for the Districts are available at wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports. If you are unable to access the documents on the website, you may contact the President's Office to request a printed copy.

Rev. Eric Steinbrenner, reporter

Rev. Eric Steinbrenner, chairman

Mr. Kenneth Gosch

Rev. Richard Waldschmidt



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LIMITED-TIME SPECIAL INTEREST RATES

See full details at wels.net/CEF

For a limited time, WELS Church Extension Fund is pleased to offer special higher interest rates to new and existing investors. This incentive will help mission and mission-minded congregations with their building project goals.

INVESTMENT CERTIFICATES					
Amount/ Term	Special interest rate**	Investment minimum	Interest accrued	Interest paid	Penalty for early withdrawal
24 month	1.25%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	Up to 6 mo. interest earned
36 month	1.50%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	Up to 6 mo. interest earned
48 month	1.75%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	Up to 12 mo. interest earned
60 month	2.00%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	Up to 12 mo. interest earned
RETIREMENT/IRA CERTIFICATES					
Amount/ Term	Special interest rate**	Investment minimum	Interest accrued	Interest paid	Penalty for early withdrawal
24 month	1.25%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	6 months interest unless RMD
36 month	1.50%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	6 months interest unless RMD
48 month	1.75%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	12 months interest unless RMD
60 month	2.00%	\$25,000	Daily	Quarterly	12 months interest unless RMD

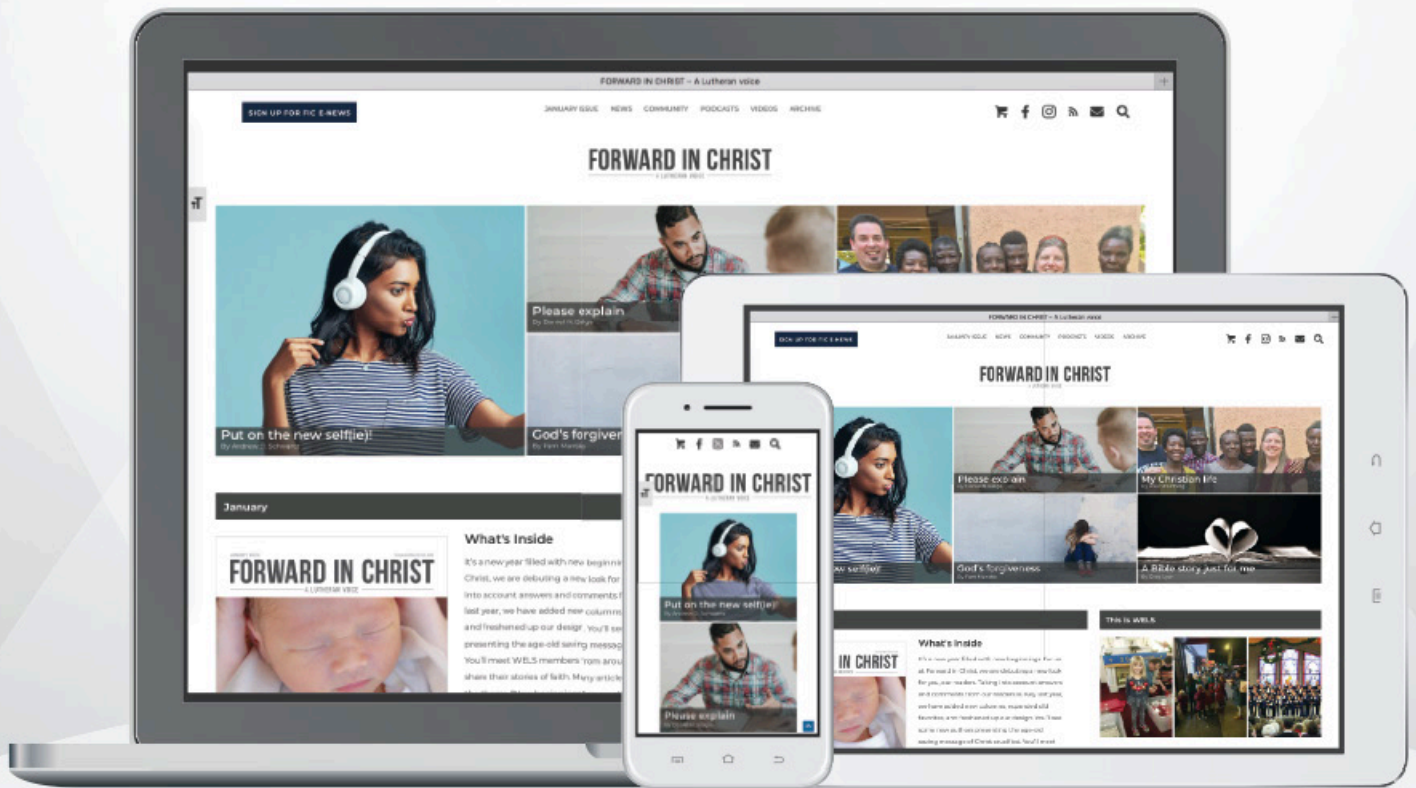
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