

# Proceedings

August 2021

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD  
Waukesha, Wisconsin

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
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**Note:**

Many references to the *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BORAM) are included within the convention resolutions. Unless otherwise noted, these are referencing the 2021 BORAM, which can be found at [wels.net/2021synodconvention](https://wels.net/2021synodconvention).

# Voting delegates

## Arizona-California District

### Pastors

Joseph Dietrich  
Jeffrey Duquaine  
Adam Mueller  
Daniel Rautenberg  
Christopher Schroeder\*  
Martin Spaude  
Joshua Stahmann  
James Werner\*

### Teachers and staff ministers

Adam Bohl  
Christopher Mundstock  
Darren Vogt  
Joel Walker

### Laymen

Allan Baker  
Tom Banholzer  
Jon Burk  
Harry Demetres\*  
Robert Detrich  
Greg Dillon  
Bragg Eastin\*  
Brian Heinitz

Gene Jenkins  
Dave Koester  
Bob McClelland  
Erik Schossow  
Ray Steele  
Jerry Strand  
Frederick Thomas Sr.  
Kim Winsor

## Dakota-Montana District

### Pastors

David Boettcher  
Tony Hansen  
Andrew Krause  
John Schroeder

### Teachers and staff ministers

Timothy Schubkegel\*

### Laymen

Kurt Austad\*  
Robert Feldhus  
Wade Kincaid  
Kevin Oberhofer

Steve Randall  
Steve Schumacher  
Robert Thrun  
Karl Wenz

## Michigan District

### Pastors

Stephen Daley\*  
Kenneth Jahnke  
Mark Kipfmiller  
Roger Knepprath  
Ronald Kruse  
Thomas Meissner  
David Mielke  
Scott Mosher  
Jacob Reich  
Adam Seelow\*

### Teachers and staff ministers

Matthew Augustine\*  
Seth LaBair  
Jordan Siegler  
Joshua von Stein

### Laymen

Scott Albrecht  
Eric Bienz  
Harold Cooper  
Rick Crego  
Robert Fecho\*  
Thomas Furner  
Gary Gilgen\*  
Ken Hoekstra Jr.  
Jacob Kinglbeil  
Ernie Koepke  
Matt Koepke  
Tom Metzger\*

Ron Nichol  
Daniel Nieman  
Mike Oglesbee  
Aaron Smuda\*  
Mark Snyder  
John Tauscher\*  
Eric Taylor  
Mark Virant\*  
Robert Wagner  
Wayne Wilch  
Tim Wildauer

\* Served as an in-person delegate

## Minnesota District

### Pastors

Daniel Balge\*  
Johann Caauwe  
Eugene DeVries  
Joel Fredrich  
Joel Gawrisch  
Edwin Lehmann  
Lawrence Olson  
James Panning\*  
David Peters  
Mark Rieke  
David Rosenow  
David Russow  
Mark Wessel

### Teachers and staff ministers

William Arndt  
David Biedenbender  
Steven Jensen  
David Retzlaff\*  
Scott Schmudlach\*  
Jeffrey Schoenherr  
Mark Tacke  
Rollin Timm  
Michael Vileger  
David Zabel

### Laymen

David Beadell  
Gary Burns  
Andrew Chiu  
Michael Dvorak  
Arnie Fick  
William Gorder  
David Greenlaw  
Donald Groth  
Adam Hansen  
Wayne Paulsen\*  
Dave Pfeiffer  
George Raasch  
Lloyd Schultz

Kevin Smith  
Paul Snyder  
Peter Stern  
Michael Valteau  
John Wiese  
Doug Woodward\*  
Kevin Zeltwanger

## Nebraska District

### Pastors

Paul Biedenbender  
Philip Henning  
Brent Merten  
Jonathan Rockhoff\*  
Thomas Schneider  
Timothy Spiegelberg

### Teachers and staff ministers

Steven Bremer\*  
Jeffrey Schultz

### Laymen

Mark Arstein  
James Berger  
Greg Green  
Jeremy Korell  
Michael Marotz  
Ed Mosshammer

Greg Neitzke  
Jeff Schmidt\*  
Wes Schroeder\*  
Ken Stephens\*  
Larry Todd  
Clint Westerberg

## North Atlantic District

### Pastors

Roger Rockhoff  
Michael Seifert\*  
Paul Waldek

### Laymen

Jim Bruland  
Mitch Capelle\*  
Roger Krahn  
Richard Kuehn

James Lake  
Bill Schramm  
Josh Semrow  
Les Stegman

## Northern Wisconsin District

### Pastors

Aaron Dolan  
Noah Headrick  
Michael Kampman  
Brad Krause\*  
Matthew Langebartels  
Stephen Luchterhand  
Andrew Luehring  
Aaron Mueller\*  
Michael Novotny  
Aaron Schultz  
Glenn Schwanke\*  
Bruce Schwark\*  
Robert Weiss  
Adam Zimpelmann

### Teachers and staff ministers

Jacob Geidel  
John Giddings  
Adam Glodowski  
Aaron Hartwig  
Philp Hochmuth  
Nathan Nolte\*  
Daniel Vogel  
Kristian Walta\*  
Benton Witte

### Laymen

Londale Anderson  
Eric Dahle  
Ellery Gulbrand\*  
Rod Haskins\*  
Ken Jungwirth  
Rick Kerr  
William Klass  
Michael Pfeifer  
Jeff Rahmlow\*  
Justin Rhode\*  
Ken Seebold  
Dave Seibel\*

\* Served as an in-person delegate

## Pacific Northwest District

### Pastors

David Birsching  
Geoffrey Cortright  
Pao Moua

### Teachers and staff ministers

Joel Plocher

### Laymen

Sterling Bath  
Juul Quick  
Huu Trung Le

Robert Warthen  
Mark White

## South Atlantic District

### Pastors

Caleb Davisson\*  
Andrew Johnston  
Benjamin Kuerth  
Carlos Leyrer\*  
Ib Meyer  
Joel Seifert  
Benjamin Zahn

### Teachers and staff ministers

Luke Hartzell  
Kurtis Hoppe  
Josiah Jahns  
James Schroeder  
Jeffrey Sell  
Scott Sievert\*

### Laymen

Eric Buskirk  
Brian Cottrell  
Kris Heine  
Aaron Marohl  
Leonard McCoo  
Tim Snell  
Duane Strobel\*

Rhett Termini

## South Central District

### Pastors

Michael Geiger  
John Hering  
John Koelpin\*  
Nathan Sutton\*

### Laymen

Mark Browning  
Ron Burkhard  
Steve Groth  
Dan Helmreich  
Harold Krantz\*

Ricky McCormick  
Scott Salesky\*  
Heath Wilson

## Southeastern Wisconsin District

### Pastors

Jonathan Bergemann  
John Bortulin  
Brady Coleman\*  
Arthur Faught  
Seth Haakenson  
Brian Hackmann\*  
Paul Horn  
Philip Huebner\*  
Joshua Kesting  
Daniel Marshall  
Steven Pagels\*  
John Roekle  
Mark Rohrback  
Kurt Schaser\*  
Eric Schroeder  
E. Allen Sorum  
Johnold Strey\*

### Teachers and staff ministers

Mark Blauert  
James Boggs  
Robert Dusseau  
John Freese  
Timothy Hochmuth  
Samuel Hunter  
Daniel Johnson  
John Kaesmeyer  
Michael Koestler  
Timothy Kuehl  
Matthew Linton  
Timothy MacKain  
Gerald Marowsky  
Mark Nolte  
Edward Noon  
Greg Obermiller  
Paul Patterson  
Benjamin Schramm\*  
Daniel Schultz  
Kurt Steffen  
David Stoltz  
Joshua Walker  
Daryl Weber\*

### Laymen

Alex Alonte  
Melvin Callies  
Todd Feltner\*  
Brian Garcia\*  
Jim Groth  
Peter Gurney\*  
Tim Hammond  
Ron Marrs  
Greg Martin\*  
Lyle Menke  
Dan Miller\*  
James Moeller  
Robert Musgrave\*  
Ron Schmidt  
Tom Steinbach  
Jaque Vallier  
John Zampanti

\* Served as an in-person delegate

## Western Wisconsin District

### Pastors

Nathan Berg  
Justin Cloute\*  
Jerry Ewings\*  
Tim Gumm  
Steven Hillmer\*  
Joel Kluender\*  
James Nelson  
Richard Pamperin  
Scott Schwertfeger  
Paul Tullberg  
Philip Wilde

### Teachers and staff ministers

Paul Bauer  
James Buege  
Mark Eternick  
James Grasby\*  
Mark Kjenstad  
Timothy Matthies  
John Melso\*  
Scott Nerby  
Thomas Plitzuweit  
Kevin Proeber Jr.  
Timothy Voigt

### Laymen

James Christie  
John Deglow\*  
Ron Demulling\*  
Stuard Everhart  
Lavern Georgson  
Ryan Hoefler\*  
Ron Lang  
Steve Loehr\*  
Len Luedtke  
Joel Marheine\*  
Otto Mattke

Doug Miller\*  
Steve Oelkers\*  
Gregory Pope\*  
Joel Scott\*  
Charles Stoerzinger  
Mark Werre  
Tim Wiedenfield\*  
Mike Winter

## World missionaries

Abram Degner  
Peter Janke  
Daniel Rautenberg

\* Served as an in-person delegate



# Advisory delegates

## Officers

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

## District presidents

Rev. Jon Buchholz, Arizona-California  
Rev. Donald Tollefson, North Atlantic  
Rev. Charles Westra, South Atlantic  
Rev. Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin

## Synodical Council

Mr. Bradley Johnston, South Central  
Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn, Northern Wisconsin  
Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, pastor-at-large

## Board for Ministerial Education

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

## Home and World Missions

Rev. Keith Free, administrator, Board for Home Missions  
Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman, Board for Home Missions  
Rev. Larry M. Schlomer, administrator, Board for World Missions  
Rev. Paul Janke, chairman, Board for World Missions  
Mr. Sean Young, director, Missions Operations

## Congregational Services

Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator, Congregational Services and director, Commission on Congregational Counseling  
Rev. James Behringer, director, Commission on Special Ministries  
Rev. Donn Dobberstein, director, Commission on Discipleship  
Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director, Commission on Worship  
Mrs. Cindi Holman, national coordinator of early childhood education, Commission on Lutheran Schools  
Mr. Paul Patterson, associate director, Commission on Lutheran Schools\*  
Teacher James Rademan, director, Commission on Lutheran Schools  
Rev. Eric Roecker, director, Commission on Evangelism  
Prof. David Scharf, chairman, Commission on Congregational Counseling

## Other

Rev. John Braun, executive editor, *Forward in Christ*  
Prof. James Danell, Commission on Inter-Church Relations  
Mr. Lee Hitter, director, Communication Services  
Mr. Jim Holm, director, WELS Foundation and WELS Investment Funds, Inc.  
Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director, Ministry of Christian Giving  
Mr. Dennis Maurer, director, Human Resources  
Mr. Scott Page, director, WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.  
Mr. Joshua Peterman, director, Benefit Plans  
Rev. Michael Schultz, director, WELS Hymnal Project\*  
Rev. Daniel Sims, director, WELS Christian Aid and Relief  
Mr. Martin Spriggs, chief technology officer  
Mr. Bill Ziche, president, Northwestern Publishing House

\* Also served as an in-person voting delegate

# Floor committees

## Committee #1: President's Report

### In person

Pastor Michael Seifert, chairman  
Pastor Brad Krause, secretary  
Layman Robert Fecho  
Layman Justin Rhode

### Virtual

Pastor David Boettcher  
Pastor Philip Henning  
Pastor John Roekle  
Pastor Timothy Spiegelberg

Teacher Adam Bohl  
Teacher Mark Eternick  
Teacher Philip Hochmuth  
Teacher Matthew Linton  
Teacher Michael Vlieger  
Layman Adam Hansen  
Layman Aaron Marohl  
Layman Ricky McCormick  
Layman Daniel Nieman  
Layman Clint Westerberg  
Layman Mike Winter

## Committee #2: Conference of Presidents

### In person

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman  
Teacher John Melso, secretary  
Layman Harry Demetres  
Layman Steve Oelkers

### Virtual

Pastor Aaron Dolan  
Pastor Scott Mosher  
Pastor Joel Seifert  
Pastor Joshua Stahmann

Teacher Adam Glodowski  
Teacher Timothy Hochmuth  
Teacher Joshua von Stein  
Layman Alex Alonte  
Layman Mark Browning  
Layman Eric Dahle  
Layman Greg Green  
Layman Michael Oglesbee  
Layman Peter Stern  
Layman Robert Wagner

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

### In person

Pastor Kurt Schaser, chairman  
Teacher Timothy Schubkegel, secretary  
Layman Dan Miller  
Layman Aaron Smuda

### Virtual

Pastor Joseph Dietrich  
Pastor Joel Fredrich  
Pastor Tony Hansen  
Pastor Ib Meyer  
Pastor Robert Weiss

Pastor Daniel Rautenberg  
Teacher John Giddings  
Teacher Daniel Johnson  
Teacher Jeffrey Sell  
Teacher Jordan Siegler  
Layman Allan Baker  
Layman Eric Buskirk  
Layman Michael Dvorak  
Layman Greg Neitzke  
Layman Ron Nichol  
Layman Ken Seebold

## Committee #4: Ministry of Christian Giving

### In person

Pastor Adam Seelow, chairman  
Teacher Matthew Augustine, secretary  
Layman Brian Garcia  
Layman Jeff Schmidt

### Virtual

Pastor Johann Caauwe  
Pastor Jeffrey Duquaine  
Pastor Peter Janke  
Pastor Joshua Kesting  
Pastor Edwin Lehmann

Pastor Benjamin Zahn  
Teacher Samuel Hunter  
Teacher Kevin Proeber  
Teacher Rollin Timm  
Teacher Benton Witte  
Layman Scott Albrecht  
Layman James Berger  
Layman Andrew Chiu  
Layman Donald Groth  
Layman Steve Groth  
Layman Ken Jungwirth  
Layman Wade Kincaid

## Committee #5: Communication Services

### In person

Pastor Justin Cloute, chairman  
Pastor James Werner, secretary  
Layman Bragg Eastin

### Virtual

Pastor Michael Geiger  
Pastor David Mielke  
Pastor Lawrence Olson  
Pastor Mark Rohrback

Teacher Paul Bauer  
Teacher John Kaesmeyer  
Teacher James Schroeder  
Teacher Mark Tacke  
Layman Sterling Bath  
Layman Thomas Furnner  
Layman Lloyd Schultz  
Layman Jaque Vallier  
Layman Kevin Zeltwanger

## Committee #6: Synodical Council

### In person

Pastor Steven Hillmer, chairman  
Teacher Daryl Weber, secretary  
Layman Gregory Pope  
Layman Ken Stephens

### Virtual

Pastor Nathan Berg  
Pastor John Bortulin  
Pastor Abram Degner  
Pastor David Russow

Pastor Martin Spaude  
Staff Minister Mark Blauert  
Teacher William Arndt  
Teacher Timothy Matthies  
Teacher Kurt Steffen  
Layman Arnold Fick  
Layman Bob McClelland  
Layman Steve Schumacher  
Layman Robert Warthen  
Layman Wayne Wilch  
Layman Randall Wilson

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

### In person

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Teacher Nathan Nolte, secretary  
Layman Greg Martin  
Layman Tom Metzger

### Virtual

Pastor Joel Gawrisch  
Pastor John Hering  
Pastor Thomas Meissner  
Pastor Roger Rockhoff

Pastor Michael Schultz  
Teacher James Buege  
Teacher Thomas Plitzuweit  
Teacher Daniel Vogel  
Layman Ron Burkard  
Layman Dan Helmreich  
Layman Gene Jenkins  
Layman Lyle Menke  
Layman Steve Randall  
Layman Kevin Smith  
Layman Larry Todd

## Committee #8: Home Missions

### In person

Pastor Aaron Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Steven Bremer, secretary  
Layman Peter Gurney  
Layman Scott Salesky

### Virtual

Pastor Jonathan Bergemann  
Pastor Noah Headrick  
Pastor Mark Kipfmiller

Pastor David Peters  
Teacher Steven Jensen  
Teacher Christopher Mundstock  
Teacher Joshua Walker  
Layman William Gorder  
Layman Jeremy Korell  
Layman Michael Marotz  
Layman Ronald Schmidt  
Layman Robert Thrun  
Layman Tim Wildauer

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

### In person

Pastor Philip Huebner, chairman  
Teacher Kristian Walta, secretary  
Layman Kurt Austad  
Layman Wes Schroeder

### Virtual

Pastor Paul Horn  
Pastor Kenneth Jahnke

Pastor Benjamin Kuerth  
Staff Minister James Boggs  
Teacher Aaron Hartwig  
Teacher Timothy MacKain  
Teacher Daren Vogt  
Layman Melvin Callies  
Layman Leonard McCoo  
Layman David Pfeifer  
Layman Frederick Thomas Sr.

## Committee #10: Ministerial Education

### In person

Pastor Steven Pagels, chairman  
Pastor Christopher Schroeder, secretary  
Layman Todd Feltner  
Layman Jeff Rahmlow

### Virtual

Pastor Tim Gumm  
Pastor Michael Kampman

Pastor Mark Rieke  
Layman Mark Arstein  
Layman Robert Feldhus  
Layman Jim Groth  
Layman Ken Hoekstra Jr  
Layman Otto Mattke  
Layman Juul Quick  
Layman George Raasch  
Layman John Wiese

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

### In person

Pastor Brian Hackmann, chairman  
Teacher David Retzlaff, secretary  
Layman Wayne Paulsen  
Layman Joel Scott

### Virtual

Pastor Roger Knepprath  
Pastor Matthew Langebartels  
Pastor David Rosenow  
Pastor Scott Schwertfeger

Pastor E Allen Sorum  
Pastor Philip Wilde  
Teacher David Biedenbender  
Teacher Michael Koestler  
Teacher Joel Walker  
Layman Eric Bienz  
Layman Rick Crego  
Layman Rick Kerr  
Layman Dave Koester  
Layman Ed Mosshammer

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

### In person

Teacher James Grasby, chairman  
Pastor Jonathan Rockhoff, secretary  
Layman Doug Miller  
Layman Robert Musgrave

Teacher Timothy Kuehl  
Teacher Seth LeBair  
Teacher Gerald Marowsky  
Teacher Scott Nerby  
Layman William Klass  
Layman Ron Lange  
Layman Erik Schossow  
Layman Josh Semrow  
Layman Eric Taylor  
Layman Michael Vallea

### Virtual

Pastor Eugene DeVries  
Pastor Andrew Krause  
Pastor Daniel Marshall  
Pastor James Nelson

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

### In person

Teacher Scott Schmudlach, chairman  
Teacher Robert Dusseau, secretary  
Layman Mitch Capelle  
Layman Ryan Hoefer

Pastor Thomas Schneider  
Pastor John Schroeder  
Teacher Mark Nolte  
Layman Gary Burns  
Layman Brian Cottrell  
Layman Ernie Koepke  
Layman Ron Marrs  
Layman Charles Stoerzinger

### Virtual

Pastor Ronald Kruse  
Pastor Andrew Luehring

## Committee #14: Support Services

### In person

Teacher Benjamin Schramm, chairman  
Pastor Joel Kluender, secretary  
Layman Harold Krantz  
Layman Doug Woodward

Pastor Eric Schroeder  
Teacher Edward Noon  
Teacher David Zabel  
Layman Jim Bruland  
Layman Jon Burk  
Layman Tim Hammond  
Layman Kris Heine  
Layman Jacob Klingbeil  
Layman Michael Pfeifer  
Layman Tom Steinbach

### Virtual

Pastor Paul Biedenbender  
Pastor Brent Merten  
Pastor Michael Novotny  
Pastor Jacob Reich

## Committee #15: Subsidiaries

### In person

Pastor John Koelpin, chairman  
Teacher Scott Sievert, secretary  
Layman Rod Haskins  
Layman Joel Marheine

Teacher Greg Obermiller  
Teacher Jeffrey Schoenherr  
Layman Londale Anderson  
Layman James Christie  
Layman Harold Cooper  
Layman Greg Dillon  
Layman Gary Gilgen  
Layman Bill Schramm  
Layman Rhett Termini  
Layman Kim Winsor  
Layman John Zampanti

### Virtual

Pastor David Birsching  
Pastor Arthur Faught  
Pastor Daniel Rautenberg  
Pastor Mark Wessel  
Teacher John Freese

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

### **In person**

Pastor Stephen Daley, chairman  
Pastor James Panning, secretary  
Layman John Deglow  
Layman Ron Demulling

### **Virtual**

Pastor Seth Haakenson  
Pastor Andrew Johnston  
Pastor Pao Moua

Teacher Josiah Jahns  
Teacher David Stoltz  
Layman Stuart Everhart  
Layman Huu Trung Le  
Layman Len Luedtke  
Layman James Moeller  
Layman Kevin Oberhofer  
Layman Tim Snell  
Layman Ray Steele  
Layman Mark Werre

## Committee #17: WELS Christian Aid and Relief

### **In person**

Pastor Carlos Leyrer, chairman  
Pastor Brady Coleman, secretary  
Layman John Tauscher  
Layman Tim Wiedenfeld

### **Virtual**

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand

Staff Minister Mark Kjenstad  
Teacher Kurtis Hoppe  
Teacher Daniel Schultz  
Layman David Greenlaw  
Layman Brian Heinitz  
Layman Mark Snyder  
Layman Jerry Strand  
Layman Karl Wenz

## Committee #18: Constitutional Matters

### **In person**

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary  
Layman Ellery Gulbrand  
Layman Duane Strobel

### **Virtual**

Pastor Richard Pamperin

Pastor Paul Waldek  
Teacher Jacob Geidel  
Teacher Paul Patterson  
Layman Dave Beadell  
Layman Robert Detrich  
Layman Roger Krahn  
Layman James Lake  
Layman Les Stegman

## Committee #19: Benefit Plans and Pension Proposal

### **In person**

Pastor Caleb Davisson, secretary  
Layman Steve Loehr  
Layman Dave Seibel  
Layman Mark Virant

### **Virtual**

Pastor Adam Mueller, chairman  
Pastor Geoffrey Cortright  
Pastor Aaron Schultz  
Pastor Paul Tullberg

Pastor Adam Zimpelmann  
Teacher Luke Hartzell  
Teacher Joel Plocher  
Teacher Jeffrey Schultz  
Teacher Timothy Voigt  
Layman Tom Banhozer  
Layman Lavern Georgson  
Layman Matt Koepke  
Layman Richard Kuehn  
Layman Paul Snyder  
Layman Mark White

## Committee #20: Steering

### **In person**

Pastor Jon Buchholz, chairman, Arizona-California District President

Pastor Donald Tollefson, North Atlantic District President

Pastor Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin District President



# President's Report

July 27, 2021

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

President Mark Schroeder

**F**ive hundred years ago, Martin Luther stood before a gathering of the most powerful political and religious leaders in the world in the German city of Worms. He had been summoned there with the demand that he retract the things he had said and written regarding how the church of his day had strayed from the truth of the Scriptures. Knowing that a refusal to meet those demands could very likely result in his death, Luther nevertheless stood firm. He then spoke those famous words that we recall to this day: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."

It's not clear whether Luther actually spoke the words, "Here I stand; I can do no other," but stand is exactly what he did. He stood firmly on the Scriptures and on the truth that those Scriptures proclaimed. He stood firmly on the grace of God and on the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He stood anchored in the clear promises that God had given to him and to all believers.

So today, 500 years later, the theme of this convention presents us with an opportunity—as individuals, as congregations, and as a synod—to stand exactly where Luther stood, on the unchanging Word of God as proclaimed in the Scriptures.

By the grace of God—not by our own power or strength—we stand on those Scriptures because everything they tell us—about God, about history, about our Savior, about ourselves—is absolutely and unchangeably true. In a world where absolute truth is claimed not to exist, in a world where what is seen today as true can be discarded as myth and fairy tale tomorrow, in a world where the lies of Satan have captured the minds and hearts of so many, God's truth is the only foundation on which his church today can stand if we are to remain faithful to him and if we as God's people are to carry out our God-given mission of proclaiming his saving message to the world.

The culture surrounding us will attack God's truth and those who hold to it. What God has told us about marriage, about gender, about racial issues, about human life, about respect and love for others, about creation, about the depravity and lost condition of human beings by their very nature—the list is endless—is being attacked and undermined relentlessly. Those truths and the people who hold to them are under attack from a godless culture, an unbelieving world, and even from a large segment of the Christian church. Faithful Christians standing on the truth of God's Word may not be hauled before the emperor and threatened with death, but know that we will be attacked. We will be accused of being ignorant, mired in the past, backwards and gullible, bigots and haters. The forces of Satan will do all they can to silence and muzzle us from proclaiming and teaching the truth that God has entrusted to us. It has never been easy for the church, and it will only get harder as we continue living in these last days.

Our only defense against these attacks is to do what Luther did. To stand boldly on the truth of God's Word. To speak the message that he has entrusted to us. To trust in the promises that he has graciously given us. To look to that Word for the strength of faith, the clarity of conviction, and the boldness to be faithful witnesses. To say with the apostles, "We can't help speaking about the things we have seen and heard."

And as we stand on the Scriptures, as we grasp by faith the truths that God has given to us, he promises to bless us with a growing faith, with an unchanging joy no matter what the circumstances, and with a zeal to lead sinners to the cross and the empty tomb of Christ.

No matter what issue or task our synod addresses, it's on that unchanging foundation of God's Word that we pray our synod will remain centered and from which it will be blessed with strength and faithfulness.

The last year and a half presented us with some unprecedented challenges. In just a matter of weeks, the world changed with the emergence of COVID-19. We were faced with restrictions imposed by the government to slow the spread of the disease. Some of those restrictions impacted the very heart of what our mission is: public worship and the preaching of the gospel. We wrestled with the responsibility to respect the governing authorities as long as they were not commanding us to go against the clear teachings of Scripture. We struggled to find the balance between showing love and concern for our neighbor on the one hand and resisting pressure to back away from public worship on the other. It was gratifying to see how congregations, despite the limitations and restrictions that were imposed, found new and creative ways to see to it that worship and the preaching of God's Word would continue. Congregations took steps to follow guidelines calling for social distancing and careful hygiene without giving in to pressure to discontinue public worship altogether. Members of congregations worked very hard to be good citizens when it came to the protocols imposed. Others who were not as convinced about the need for such measures showed patience with those who desired a more careful approach.

But that wasn't always the case. Every congregation of our synod is comprised of people who have different opinions when it comes to things that are not decided by Scripture. In some congregations such differences of opinion sometimes pitted member against member, pastor against congregational leadership, called worker against called worker. It's my prayer that those divisions in outward matters have been resolved by Christians who have prayed for Christian patience and love for those who may have disagreed with them. That's a prayer that all of us need to pray. What a tragedy it would be if simmering hard feelings over outward issues would lead us to forget the spiritual unity that we have been given in Christ and distract us from the mission God has given us to carry out.

As a delegate to this convention, you are experiencing one way in which the synod was impacted by the pandemic. Last January, the Conference of Presidents (COP) needed to decide about how to carry out the 2021 convention. The COP could have planned to have the convention as normal. But there was no way of knowing what conditions would be in July and what restrictions might still be in place. Canceling the convention entirely was not considered a viable option. Originally the convention was scheduled to be held at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Mich. At that time Michigan was under some of the tightest restrictions of any state, and it was likely that the easing of those restrictions would come later in Michigan than elsewhere. For that reason, the Conference of Presidents decided to move the convention to Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, where Wisconsin's fewer restrictions would likely have less impact. But even with that change, it was not possible to know if a convention of 400 delegates would be possible. The COP determined that, given all the circumstances, a "mini-convention" would be held in which all delegates would serve but only about 25 percent would attend the convention in person. The COP knew that this was not ideal, but it seemed to be the most prudent way to proceed.

We don't know why God permitted this pandemic to strike our world—other than to know that he always is actively doing two things: calling us to repentance and leading us to trust in his promises with a faith made stronger by adversity. Now that the worst of the pandemic seems to be over, we look back and are assured that God was working to bless us and to bring us closer to himself. And we look forward with a rededication to being what he has intended his church to be.

In many ways, the synod has come through the pandemic in good shape and has indeed been blessed. It's likely that the restrictions and limitations on corporate worship have kindled a renewed appreciation for gathering with fellow believers to hear the Word, to worship together, and to commune alongside our fellow believers. The use of technology to continue the preaching of God's Word has likely resulted in more people hearing the gospel than otherwise would have. Perhaps the experience of seeing our whole world change in a matter of weeks is another good reminder to place our trust in God and his promises and not to take his outward blessings for granted. Financially, God's people remained faithful in bringing their offerings during the past year, and, in fact, were even more generous than before. That was true for the offerings received by the synod and, in many cases, for congregations.

With those increased offerings, no reductions in mission or ministry were required by the synod. In fact, the Synodical Council was able to approve additional resources for previously unfunded ministry. Plans are currently underway to increase the number of new home mission congregations that will be established. The Board for World Missions is working to respond to many new opportunities to share the gospel and, God-willing, will soon enter a number of new fields. The building of the school that will be used as a place to train Hmong pastors in Vietnam was delayed due to

travel restrictions, but the construction is expected to begin soon (if it has not already been begun by the time of the convention). World Missions is also making good use of technology to reach thousands of people with the gospel, and in partnership with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) is responding to requests from around the world for theological training. Construction of fully funded new facilities on the campus of Martin Luther College has begun, both to meet the needs of the school and as part of the effort to recruit and train more students for ministry. Congregational Services, which reports to the Conference of Presidents, is working to provide resources and assistance to congregations as they address both challenges and opportunities in the areas of discipleship, evangelism, worship, special ministries, and planning. In addition to that, the work on the synod's new hymnal has been completed and is being introduced at this convention—a reminder of the value that our synod places on corporate liturgical worship. At this convention, you will hear the details of all of this work that has continued during the pandemic and of how God is blessing those efforts.

WELS continues to experience a shortage of called workers. Congregations are experiencing longer than normal vacancies and called workers are receiving calls more frequently. It's true that the number of available workers varies from year to year and often goes in cycles. Only a decade ago we were not able to place all of our graduates. Now we face the opposite challenge of not having enough candidates for ministry. We are happy to note that seminary classes in the next few years will be larger, numbering in the 40s instead of the mid-30s. It's important that we rededicate ourselves as a synod, as congregations, and as individual called workers and lay members to recruit young people for ministry as diligently and energetically as we can. The fields are indeed ripe for harvest. Workers are needed to go into those harvest fields. Pray that God will provide workers who will serve God's people and reach the lost.

Some have been asking about the potential impact of the proposed federal Equality Act on Christian churches and religious organizations, including our own synod. The Equality Act was first passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019 but was not adopted by the U.S. Senate at that time. It was passed again by the House of Representatives on February 25, 2021, and may well be introduced into the Senate in the near future. Since that time, lawsuits have also been filed in federal courts seeking to implement the provisions of the Equality Act even if it is not signed into law.

The Equality Act and the current lawsuit seek to make sexual orientation and gender identity a protected class, just like one's biological sex, under our nation's current federal non-discrimination laws. As a church we do not express opinions on purely political matters. However, the concern in this case is that aspects of the Equality Act could make it very difficult for the church to carry out its mission and could jeopardize our religious freedom to preach and teach God's Word faithfully.

At this point, there is much we don't know. For one thing, it is not known when or if the Senate will take up the bill, although it could do so at any time. For another thing, if the bill should pass the Senate, it is not known what specific restrictions would be imposed on Christian churches and institutions, what the result of the current lawsuit will be, or what the result will be when legal appeals are made to the courts in regard to religious freedom concerns.

This concern is justified, since in its present form the Equality Act appears not to provide for religious exemptions. It is possible, therefore, that under the provisions of this act, identifying certain types of behavior as sinful could be considered unlawful hate speech. It could result in the loss of our tax-exempt status. It could also affect the ability of our colleges to receive federal funding for scholarships, grants, and loans for their students. It could create pressure on pastors to avoid some areas of biblical teaching (although we should be confident that our pastors would not succumb to that pressure). There are several other ways in which carrying out our normal daily operations as churches and schools could potentially be affected in regard to things like facilities, health insurance policies, and sports programs.

Our entire focus as a Christian church is to proclaim God's law and gospel in order to convict people of sin and to assure people of forgiveness through the sacrificial death of Christ, our Savior. We recognize that the only way for people to have an appropriate view of any situation of life, including matters of sexual identity, is to know and believe in Jesus. As a result, we do not believe that seeking to prevent a law from coming into existence will change anyone's heart. We also do not make it our goal to simply change anyone's external behavior. Further, we do not in any way condone behavior that shows hatred or disrespect to any individual. Such behavior is also sinful.

Our desire and responsibility, however, is to continue practicing our faith in humility and love, as we share with ourselves and others what God says in his Word for our eternal good. As individual Christian citizens, you may well

exercise your citizenship by contacting your U.S. senators to express any concerns you may have. We encourage all of you to pray that, if the Equality Act should become law, no aspect of the law will be allowed to compromise our ability to freely share God's Word. In other words, pray that religious exemptions be maintained, as has been the constitutional right the Lord has allowed us to enjoy for many years. Although the Bible does not guarantee that right, it has been a blessing that we have cherished. If that should not be the case, then we further encourage your prayers that the Lord would give us the boldness and courage to be faithful to him, no matter the earthly consequences, as we work together as brothers and sisters in Christ to continue to carry out our Savior's mission. The work of God's kingdom will always move forward.

We will certainly need to keep alert to further developments and to communicate those when appropriate.

There are other legal issues that have the potential to affect our synod. In a case in Illinois, a Roman Catholic congregation terminated the employment of a music minister when the music minister married his same sex partner, since that action was contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine. When the music minister sued the congregation for wrongful termination, the court ruled against the Catholic parish. The parish appealed to the federal circuit court of appeals, and a single judge denied the appeal. Then the parish appealed again, asking that the case be heard by the entire circuit court. Along with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, WELS joined this lawsuit as a “friend of the court.” We did this because an adverse ruling in this case could very well restrict our ability to ensure that called workers in our church agree with and uphold our synod's doctrine and practice. At the time of this writing, the case is still pending. If the court of appeals rules in favor of the terminated music minister, it is certain that the case will be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Our synod will be facing challenges not only from our government and court system. We will also be attacked by a culture that opposes everything we believe and proclaim.

Christianity has had to deal with such attacks since New Testament times. Opponents of the gospel have not simply condemned the teachings of God's Word; they have also sought to silence anyone who proclaims God's truth. Jesus spent his entire ministry hounded by religious leaders who wanted nothing more than for him to be quiet. After Pentecost, when Peter and John publicly confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Jewish leaders responded by ordering them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John would not be silenced. They said, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” One apostle after another lost his life for refusing to be silenced, but they continued to preach the good news.

Centuries later, John Hus was burned at the stake by church leaders for boldly confessing Christ after he was ordered to stop. When Martin Luther was told to keep silent about the truths that he had discovered in Scripture and about the errors of the church of his day, he kept preaching and writing. For that he was first excommunicated and then placed under a death sentence.

Faithful proclamation of God's Word has always been met by those who want to silence God's messengers. It's no different for the church and for our synod today. Salvation by grace alone is dismissed as being irrelevant. The sacraments, which convey God's forgiveness and have the power to work and strengthen faith through God's Word and his promises, are dismissed as mere symbols or relics of the past. When the church faithfully teaches that human life begins at conception and that the taking of that life is murder, many leap to muzzle God's truth by labeling the church as backward in its thinking and unsupportive of women. When God's Word teaches that marriage is a lifelong union between one man and one woman, Christians are labeled as haters and bigots.

Not just the church, but individual Christians are often the targets. Maybe it's happened in the workplace. Perhaps you've had friends “unfriend” you. You may have been shunned by your own family members.

In the face of all of these attempts to silence God's truth, it's important to remember God's promise: “My Word will not return to me empty. It will accomplish what I please and fulfil the purpose for which I sent it.” When Satan's allies try to silence us and our beliefs, it's important to say with the apostles, “We can't help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” When we state our beliefs lovingly and are accused of being closed-minded haters, it's important that we pray that God will give us the courage and a faith that refuses to bow to a bullying culture. When our beliefs make us unpopular with the world, it's important to say with the apostle Paul, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.” How thankful we can be that by God's grace, we stand firmly and steadfastly on his Word.

The synod's membership has experienced small but consistent declines for more than a decade. Certainly, this should cause us concern. But that concern should not move us to embark on an effort to grow that depends on manmade strategies and trendy programs. What it should move us to do is to be as faithful as we can in a number of areas. First, we strive with God's help to remain faithful to the Word (not changing the message to become more appealing or attractive). Second, we ask God to move each of our congregations and each of us as individuals to share the gospel whenever and wherever God gives the opportunity. Third, as we strive to be faithful to the Word and to our God-given mission, we trust firmly that God will work through his Word in the ways and places that he determines best—accomplishing his desire and achieving his purpose.

So, here we stand. On his Word. In his Word. Strengthened by the promises of his Word. Proclaiming his Word. There is no better place to stand.

*Soli Deo Gloria!* To God alone be the glory!

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Mark Schroeder  
WELS President



# Reports and resolutions

## Committee #1: President's Report

### **Subject: Appointments and installations 2019-2021**

Reference: Report from the President's Office

Report No. 01

#### **Installations**

Rev. Daniel Sims to Christian Aid and Relief

Rev. John Hartwig to European chaplain

Teacher James Sievert to Commission on Lutheran Schools

#### **Appointments**

*To Board for Home Missions*

Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman

*To Board for World Missions*

Rev. Jonathan Schroeder

*To Christian Aid and Relief*

Teacher Steven Vasold

*To WELS Church Extension Fund Board of Directors*

Mr. James Bodendorfer

Rev. Timothy Gauger

Mr. Tim Gensmer

Mr. Seth Hansen

Mr. David Hirons

Mr. Ron Kerr

*To Commission on Congregational Counseling*

Rev. Jonathan Bauer

Mr. Kurt Nitz

*To Commission on Evangelism*

Rev. Jay Bickelhaupt

Rev. Joseph Fricke

*To Commission on Inter-Church Relations*

Rev. John Koelpin

*To Commission on Lutheran Schools*

Teacher Kyle Bender

Mr. Christopher Joch

Rev. Phillip Sievert

*To Commission on Special Ministries*

Mr. Frank Penha

*To Commission on Worship*

Rev. Jacob Behnken

Mr. G. Harvey Dunn

Rev. Jason Hacker

Teacher Michael Marquardt

*To Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors*

Mr. Matthew Groth

Prof. Steven Pagels

Mr. Joel Raasch

*To Retirement Program Commission*

Mr. James Brenn

Mr. David McCullouch

Mr. Lee Miller

Rev. James Turriff

Mr. Max Wenck

*To Support Committee*

Rev. Brett Brauer

Rev. Michael Enderle

Rev. Stephen Helwig

Rev. Glenn Schwanke

*To Synodical Council*

Rev. Charles Westra, COP representative

*To VEBA Commission*

Mr. James Gabriel

Mr. Jon Wirkkula

*To WELS Foundation Board of Directors*

Mr. Mark Maurice

Mr. Mark Schulz

Mr. Kenneth Zehm

*To WELS Investment Funds Board of Directors*

Mr. Seth Hansen

Mr. Joel Luehmann

Mr. Ronald Schmitz

Mr. Dennis Walters

Mr. Max Wenck

Mr. John Wenker

Pastor Michael Seifert, chairman

Pastor Brad Krause, secretary

**Subject: *President's Report***

Reference: *President's Report*

Report No. 02

Five hundred years ago, a professor from a fledgling university in a backwater town stood before 16th century superpowers. His choice was clear: relinquish God's Word or face the consequences. We thank President Schroeder for reminding us that Luther didn't stand alone. He stood on the truth by which God gives salvation in Jesus. And God



stood with him. We thank God for the eternal blessings he has given us through Luther's stand. We pray that God will continue to bring his salvation to others through our stand on that same life-giving Word.

President Schroeder identifies some of the challenges that surround us, everywhere from the water cooler to the courtroom. We ask him to continue calling our attention to both current and potential threats and encouraging us to say with the apostles, "We can't stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." We pray that God will strengthen our faith to stand firm against hostilities of every kind and that he will fill us and the next generation with zeal to proclaim the gospel in order to win the hearts of those who attack it. Unbelief rages against its greatest need.

We join our president in thanking God for preserving our church body throughout the pandemic, for the generosity of his people, and for giving us unforeseen opportunities to proclaim the good news of Jesus' forgiveness. We pray that God will bring us out of the pandemic with harmony in our congregations and passion to proclaim to a dying world the God who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases.

Pastor Michael Seifert, chairman  
Pastor Brad Krause, secretary

### **Subject: Membership—called workers**

Reference: Report from the President's Office  
Resolution No. 01

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

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

#### **ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA DISTRICT**

Rev. Christopher M. Pflughoeft, graduate associate to the president of the Arizona-California District, Tempe, Ariz., from WLS

Mr. Austin J. DeNoyer, California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., from MLC

Mr. Callahan G. Diersen, California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., from MLC

Mr. Nathanael P. Lindloff, California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., from MLC

Mr. Alexander J. Stoeberl, Mt. Calvary Lutheran School, Redding, Calif., from MLC

Mr. Tyler Wahl, St. Mark Lutheran School, Citrus Heights, Calif., from MLC

#### **DAKOTA-MONTANA DISTRICT**

Mr. Michael J. Starr, Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D., from MLC

#### **MICHIGAN DISTRICT**

Rev. Benjamin J. Balge, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., from WLS

Rev. Caleb P. Schewe, Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran Church, Linden, Mich., from WLS

Rev. Matthew J. Steinfeldt, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Grove City, Ohio, from WLS

Rev. Matthew J. Swanson, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., from WLS

Mr. Matthew V. Fisher, Cross of Glory Lutheran School, Washington, Mich., from MLC

Mr. Justus J. Kupsky, St. John Lutheran School, Saginaw, Mich., from MLC

Mr. Jacob W. Mathena, Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich., from MLC

Mr. Ian R. Paulsen, St. John Lutheran School, Bay City, Mich., from MLC

Mr. Jesse R. Rider, St. Paul Lutheran School, South Haven, Mich., from MLC

Mr. Wade A. Shul, Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich., from MLC

Mr. Joshua A. Thiesfeldt, Crown of Life Lutheran School, Warren, Mich., from MLC

#### **MINNESOTA DISTRICT**

Rev. Lucas P. Callies, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Cedar Rapids/North Liberty, Iowa, from WLS

Rev. Adam D. Marley, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Kasson, Minn., from WLS

Rev. Dominick D. Olson, Resurrection/Life Lutheran Church, Rochester, Minn., from WLS

Rev. Philip D. Schroeder, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., from WLS  
Rev. Orié J. Thomford, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., from WLS  
Mr. Samuel M. Evans, Petra Lutheran School, Sauk Rapids, Minn., from MLC  
Mr. Brad L. Hengeveld, St. John Lutheran School, Dakota, Minn., from MLC  
Mr. Dayne W. Kopfer, Trinity Lutheran School, Belle Plaine, Minn., from MLC  
Mr. Gabriel J. Plocher, St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West Saint Paul, Minn., from MLC

#### **NEBRASKA DISTRICT**

Rev. Seth R. Krueger, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Overland Park, Kan., from WLS  
Mr. Christian S. Monday, Zion Lutheran School, Denver, Colo., from MLC  
Mr. Caleb M. Paul, Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb., from MLC

#### **NORTH ATLANTIC DISTRICT**

Rev. Jonathan D. Kock, graduate associate to the president of WELS–Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, from WLS  
Rev. Jonathan M. Lehmann, Christ Lutheran Church, Clarksville, Md., from WLS  
Rev. Timothy J. Walsh, Grace of God Lutheran Church, Dix Hills, N.Y., from WLS

#### **NORTHERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT**

Rev. Elijah A. Ehlert, St. Paul Lutheran Church, North Fond du Lac, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Martin J. Loescher, Martin Luther Lutheran Church, Neenah, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Caleb M. Rothfuss, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Clintonville, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Zachary C. Semmann, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Eldorado, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Mark W. Zondag, Asia One Team, Chiang Mai, Thailand, from WLS  
Mr. Jacob T. Bohlmann, St. Paul Lutheran School, Algoma, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Noah J. Panzer, Trinity Lutheran School, Kiel, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Alexander J. Quist, Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Dillon H. Solomon, St. John Lutheran School, Wrightstown, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Matthew J. Spoerl, St. Paul Lutheran School, Tomah, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Donovan J. Waeger, Christ Lutheran School, Eagle River, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Bryan J. Walkley, Bethany Lutheran School, Manitowoc, Wis., from MLC

#### **PACIFIC NORTHWEST DISTRICT**

Rev. Erich W. Neumann, Calvary Lutheran Church, Bellevue, Wash., from WLS

#### **SOUTH ATLANTIC DISTRICT**

Mr. Matthew D. Baehman, Divine Savior Academy, Delray Beach, Fla., from MLC  
Mr. William L. DeMarce, Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla., from MLC  
Mr. Andrew C. Mantz, Christ the King Lutheran School, Palm Coast, Fla., from MLC  
Mr. Luke R. Willems, Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla., from MLC  
Mr. Joshua S. Wong, Risen Savior Christian Academy, Pooler, Ga., from MLC  
Mr. Benjamin J. Mahnke, Abiding Love Lutheran Church, Cape Coral, Fla., from MLC

#### **SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT**

Rev. Andrew M. Nemmers, mission start, Houston, Texas, from WLS

#### **SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT**

Rev. Michael A. Dey, First Lutheran Church, Racine, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Isaac P. Hayes, St. John on the Hillside, Milwaukee, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Jacob C. Shepherd, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Round Lake Park, Ill., from WLS  
Mr. Zachary R. Bork, Salem Lutheran School, Milwaukee, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Aaron W. Fischer, Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Downers Grove, Ill., from MLC  
Mr. Samuel J. Koepsell, Mt. Calvary Lutheran School, Waukesha, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Paul M. Kramer, Risen Savior Lutheran School, Milwaukee, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Christian M. Kuether, St. Marcus Lutheran School, Milwaukee, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Marcus H. Mortensen, Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill., from MLC  
Mr. Benjamin D. Walter, Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Michael A. Tracy, Chaplains in Schools, Milwaukee, Wis., from MLC

## WESTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT

Rev. Yaffet Gabayehu, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Jason P. Lindemann, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beloit, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Daniel R. Schmidt Jr., Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from WLS  
Rev. Luke J. Thomford, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Moline, Ill., from WLS  
Rev. Jason E. Threlkeld, Grace/Trinity, Ridgeway/Wilson, Minn., from WLS  
Mr. Joshua T. Barnett, St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Ethan L. Eisenmann, Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshfield, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Joseph C. Herrewig, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Brandon P. Leiterman, St. John Lutheran School, Neillsville, Wis., from MLC  
Mr. Timothy J. Weddle, St. Paul Lutheran School, Tomah, Wis., from MLC

Pastor Michael Seifert, chairman  
Pastor Brad Krause, secretary

## ADOPTED

# Committee #2: Conference of Presidents

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

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 4-17  
Report No. 01

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

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

- We applaud all efforts involved in making the synod's ministry plan and funding it. We are especially grateful to all WELS congregations and members who continued to support the Congregation Mission Offering generously throughout the difficulties of 2020 and into 2021. We encourage congregations to continue to increase their Congregation Mission Offerings to enable the synod to maintain and even to expand its mission and ministry.
- We applaud the COP's efforts to move more synod certification classes online. We encourage the COP to provide an online option for all synod certification classes in the near future.
- We appreciate the Conference of Presidents' further discussion on providing several different options for congregational structures and encourage them to strongly consider providing these options.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman  
Teacher John Melso, secretary

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

Report No. 02

The 66th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod was attended by 330 voting delegates comprised of 100 pastors (74 virtual, 26 in-person), 3 (all virtual) world missionaries, 71 teachers/staff ministers (58 virtual, 13 in-person), and 156 lay delegates (118 virtual, 38 in-person). An additional 54 advisory delegates and 5 special guests attended all or part of the convention.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman  
Teacher John Melso, secretary

**Subject: Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 13-17

Report No. 03

Our committee commends the work of the Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee for our Savior and synod.

After reading and discussing the report of the Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee, our committee has the following encouragements:

- We are thankful to all who have encouraged and provided continuing education for our called workers. We are excited to see the increased participation of called workers in continuing education.
- We would also like to express gratitude to all generous donors who have provided matching grants to help pastors participate in continuing education. We encourage congregations to make use of these grants available through Grow in Grace as needed.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman

Teacher John Melso, secretary

**Subject: Memorial 2021-01**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 179

Report No. 04

The floor committee does not support directing the WELS Conference of Presidents to produce the specified doctrinal statement regarding divorce because an application of Scripture cannot be written as law. Biblical doctrine relating to marriage, divorce, and remarriage must be applied to every individual situation. Finally, we would like to reaffirm that the Conference of Presidents' current statement is a correct explanation of the doctrine.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman

Teacher John Melso, secretary

**Subject: Expression of gratitude**

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) the accomplishment of the convention's work requires the effort of many people; and
- WHEREAS 2) the work of the synod depends on the concentrated labor of many people within its membership; therefore be it

Resolved, that the synod in convention express its gratitude to:

1. The faculty and staff of Luther Preparatory School for hosting this convention.
2. The support staff and officers of the synod for arranging and conducting the business of this convention.
3. Those who delivered the sermons and devotions; conducted the services; served as organists and instrumentalists; sang in the choirs; and in other ways led us in worship.
4. The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society for the presentation of flags.
5. The delegates and floor committees of the convention for their consecrated efforts; all who served on boards, commissions, and committees of the synod.
6. The school staff, kitchen staff, audio/visual services, technology services, pages, and volunteers who contributed their time and talent to make the convention flow smoothly to a successful completion.
7. All organizations who provided materials for the convention.
8. All other WELS agencies who provided time, materials, and representatives to inform delegates of synod work.
9. All others who helped at the convention in any way.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman

Teacher John Melso, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Location of the synod convention**

Resolution No. 02

WHEREAS Michigan Lutheran Seminary has extended an invitation to host the 2023 synod convention in Saginaw, Mich.; therefore be it

Resolved, that we accept the invitation of Michigan Lutheran Seminary with thanks.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman  
Teacher John Melso, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Memorial 2021-02**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 179

Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS 1) the doctrine of the call is clearly presented in the Bible and puts the primary focus on the Holy Spirit calling through the church; and

WHEREAS 2) the call process itself is a matter of Christian freedom; and

WHEREAS 3) the Conference of Presidents regularly re-evaluates the call process in response to questions, challenges, and suggestions from members and calling bodies; and

WHEREAS 4) the majority of our members have not taken part in a call meeting nor received the education that typically precedes one; and

WHEREAS 5) reasonable variety in practice can lead to confusion and frustration when not explained; and

WHEREAS 6) the means by which the Spirit provides us with called workers is a source of comfort and thanksgiving when properly understood; therefore be it

Resolved, a) that we encourage the Conference of Presidents to oversee production of a Bible study on the divine call to be made available to our congregations and schools; and be it further

Resolved, b) that we encourage the Conference of Presidents to oversee the writing of a series of educational articles (for *Forward in Christ*) explaining the scriptural basis for the divine call and the practical concerns that shape our current practice; and be it finally

Resolved, c) that we encourage the Conference of Presidents to create an organized way to receive congregational feedback for the Conference of Presidents regarding the call process.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman  
Teacher John Melso, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Convention offerings**

Resolution No. 04

WHEREAS a thank offering was gathered at the convention opening service and via online convention giving; therefore be it

Resolved, that the 2021 WELS convention designate the offering to Grace Hmong Outreach in Vietnam.

Pastor Nathan Sutton, chairman  
Teacher John Melso, secretary

**ADOPTED**

# Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations

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

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 18-20

Report No. 01

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 a confessional Lutheran stance. Finally, commission members stay informed on the happenings in other Lutheran church bodies around the world through periodical reading and with visits to church conventions, conferences, and symposia.

### **Our current situation**

Floor committee #3 has reviewed the report submitted by WELS CICR. We commend the decision to have the CICR work more closely with the Board for World Missions and are excited about the good work that is being done through this partnership. The One Team concept seems like a wise strategy to help carry out this important work.

We are further encouraged by all the gospel ministry work that is taking place around the world. We are thankful for the opportunities the Lord continues to present in our mission fields and the dedication of the workers in spite of a pandemic and political challenges in the world.

- Africa—In response to increased inquiries from churches in Africa, a toolkit was developed to lend step-by-step guidance toward visible church fellowship with WELS. The toolkit is currently being used to establish ties with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda.
- Asia—Work with churches, mission stations, and seminary training continues with positive results, much of it taking place online.
- Europe—Pastor Holger Weiß is the new seminary president of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. He received his Master of Sacred Theology degree from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. With this position in place, it is hoped that pastoral training continues at the ELFK seminary to help support churches in Europe.
- Latin America—We are excited about the fruit coming from the online educational program *Academia Cristo* and the possibility of establishing a Latin American church body *WELS Internacional*.

### *Evangelical Lutheran Synod*

We recognize the passing of synod president Pastor John Molstad and his many faithful years of service. We are praying that the Lord will bless the leadership of their new president Pastor Glenn Obenberger.

### *Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference*

Practicing church fellowship is often thought of from the viewpoint of the people, groups, and organizations we can't join in spiritual activities with at this time. We are grateful that the CICR continues to represent WELS in the positive work of strengthening ties with church bodies that WELS already enjoys visible church fellowship with as part of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) and by having discussions with people, groups, and organizations in an effort to explore the possibility of enjoying visible church fellowship with each other. What a joy it would be to have more Lutheran church bodies become a part of the CELC, uniting around all the truths of Scripture.

### *Church of the Lutheran Confession and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod*

Such visible unity doesn't exist presently with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). While we are disappointed

that recent efforts to re-establish visible church fellowship have been declined by the CLC, we are thankful that discussions will continue that might still lead to re-establishing visible church fellowship. And while visible church fellowship unity doesn't exist presently with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), and no active discussions are taking place with the intent of re-establishing visible church fellowship, we are pleased to hear that informal dialogue is taking place to help avoid misunderstanding and mischaracterization of each other's doctrine and practice. We encourage the CICR to keep WELS informed and up to date on these discussions.

### **Looking ahead**

Thank you to Pastor Steven Lange for his years of service with the CICR.

The One Teams, in cooperation with the Board for World Missions and CICR, have brought doctrinal clarity, advice, and encouragement to individuals and church bodies who are reaching out to WELS. We pray for God's continued guidance and direction as we view open doors, ripened fields, and increased opportunities throughout the world, ready for the Holy Spirit and his people to continue the work of the Lord for generations to come.

Pastor Kurt Schaser, chairman

Teacher Tim Schubkegel, secretary

## Committee #4: Ministry of Christian Giving

### **Subject: Overview**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 21-23

Report No. 01

We commend the Ministry of Christian Giving for striving to be faithful in its work by switching from rotating institutional campaigns to intentionally nurturing donors according to their ministry interests. We pray that God would bless its efforts.

We commend the Ministry of Christian Giving for its continued efforts in communicating Congregation Mission Offering updates and ministry impacts through WELS media, and for its diligence in presenting "Equipping Christian Witnesses" (ECW). We encourage congregations and individuals to participate in this special four-year support of Martin Luther College's mission and ministry.

We commend the Ministry of Christian Giving for its development training not only to giving counselors but also to Ministerial Education advancement staff, Missions administrators, and anyone serving in a WELS/ELS affiliated ministry in development, in order "to encourage a consistent approach to God's people that's Christ-centered" (BORAM, p. 23).

We commend the faithful work of the Christian giving counselors, especially during a time when face-to-face calls were unable to be made. We especially thank God for the faithful work of Rev. John Kenyon, who died on March 22, 2021, after a prolonged struggle with lymphatic cancer. We thank our Savior for keeping John faithful to the point of death and giving him the crown of life, and we're grateful for his years of pastoral ministry, including the last fifteen years with the Ministry of Christian Giving. We ask our caring Lord to comfort and strengthen John's family and friends. We also thank God for the faithful work of Rev. John Graf, who retired at the end of June 2021 after serving as a giving counselor for 31 years, and for the faithful work of Rev. Rich Kogler who will retire on December 31, 2021, after serving 10 years.

Finally, in a time of global pandemic we praise our gracious God for the support of the gospel ministry beyond what anyone might have imagined. We thank God for moving his people to give above and beyond what was committed for the mission, ministry, and worker training of WELS.

Pastor Adam Seelow, chairman  
Teacher Matt Augustine, secretary

## Committee #5: Communication Services

**Subject: Communication Services**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 24-26

Report No. 01

We commend Communication Services for the important work it is doing to assist the Conference of Presidents in communicating WELS' mission and ministry to the members of our synod and beyond. We live in a time when new communication technologies and platforms are transforming current practices and opening up new channels of communication that offer a plethora of new possibilities. At the same time, people continue to take an increasingly active role in choosing what information to receive, as well as how, when, and where they will receive it. In this environment, we recognize the value of the work done by the Communications Services team. Their expertise and clear, consistent messaging is vital to ensuring that the message we seek to communicate as a synod gets heard in today's complex and noisy marketplace. To that end, we encourage Communication Services to continue exploring, supporting, and expediting innovative media usage as they did during the past biennium in partnership with Northwestern Publishing House in redesigning *Forward in Christ* and in responding to the unique circumstances and challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pastor Justin Cloute, chairman  
Pastor James Werner, secretary

## Committee #6: Synodical Council

**Subject: Synodical Council overview**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 51-57

Report No. 01

Giving all praise and thanks to our gracious God who has blessed the gospel ministry among our Wisconsin Synod, we recognize these special blessings over the past years:

- The long-range plan, "Our Great Heritage," adopted in 2017, which serves as a guideline and roadmap for ministry through 2025;



- The financial blessings that were realized even through COVID times coming from increased Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO), cost savings from reduced expenses, and the \$2.78 million Small Business Administration PPP loan, as well as financial savings realized through the health reimbursement account savings plan;
- That we have received an unmodified opinion (the best opinion possible) from Baker Tilly US, LLP, an independent accounting firm that completes its annual audit of WELS financial statements;
- That the Synodical Council (SC) has been able to fill the position of a full-time director for WELS Christian Aid and Relief (Pastor Daniel Sims) who is working to promote this ministry.

We express our thanks to God for the faithful service of the following six SC members who have completed their time of service: Teacher James Moeller, Pastor Wayne Uhlhorn, Mr. Tim Snyder, Mr. Dale Pohlman, Pastor Jonathan Schroeder, and Mr. Art Tessmann.

We express our thanks to God for the dedicated work of Mr. Todd Poppe who has served as our synod's chief financial officer since 2004. Through his labors our synod has been tremendously blessed, helping to streamline operations, establish the Financial Stabilization Fund, and modify the process used to develop the synod's ministry financial plan.

Pastor Steven Hillmer, chairman  
Teacher Daryl Weber, secretary

**Subject: WELS Archives**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 63-65

Report No. 02

We acknowledge and thank the six volunteers who generously gave of their own time to help with the work of archiving and preserving our synod's history. COVID-19 brought tremendous challenges to their work, and yet through it also many blessings as "significant progress has been made on digital records and collections in the archives." Through their efforts the synod convention *Proceedings*, the *Book of Reports and Memorials*, and *The Northwestern Lutheran* are now "keyword searchable."

Pastor Steven Hillmer, chairman  
Teacher Daryl Weber, secretary

**Subject: Capital Projects Committee**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 73-75

Report No. 03

It is a tremendous blessing for our synod that our Capital Projects Committee works to oversee the maintenance, improvements, and future plans for our synod's capital needs. The detailed plan for improvements to our four synodical schools through 2023 offers many benefits.

The Capital Projects Committee also worked closely with Martin Luther College on the scope and plan for the new Betty Kohn Fieldhouse. We give thanks for the gifts from many individuals, congregations, and schools throughout WELS including a transformational gift from two individuals that have fully funded the construction of the facility, which has an anticipated opening in 2022.

Pastor Steven Hillmer, chairman  
Teacher Daryl Weber, secretary

# Committee #7: Ministry Financial Plan (Budget)

**Subject: Support for ministry financial plan 2021–23 (FY22/FY23)**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 79-103

Report No. 01

It is with joyful thanks for the blessings of our gracious God that we note that WELS is financially strong. Despite fluctuations in giving across Fiscal Year 2019–20 (FY20)—during which the COVID-19 pandemic began—WELS received nearly \$3 million dollars more in support than it expended, \$51 million vs. \$48.1 million. The worker-training schools managed their resources well in an uncertain time. The synod and its institutions were also able to make appropriate use of public programs to support workers in these uncertain times. WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, and Northwestern Publishing House finished FY20 financially stronger than when they began the year. Projections for Fiscal Year 2020–21 (FY21), as it draws to a close, are similarly strong. Estimates for Fiscal Years 2021–22 and 2022–23 (the FY22/FY23 biennium) are based on conservative assessment of recent trends and present assumptions. The Financial Stabilization Fund (BORAM, pp. 85,86) has proven to be an extremely useful tool in ministry planning and spending over the previous bienniums. It continues to allow for predictable and stable funding in the coming biennium. Important to note, the ministry financial plan for FY22/FY23 does rely on a significant (\$4.4 million) drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund in line with targeted goals for the fund. Overall, a cautious optimism permeates the ministry financial plan for the FY22/FY23 biennium.

With appreciation for the careful work of those who manage the financial affairs of our synod and with confidence that our gracious God will continue to bless our plans in the ways that he knows are best, we support the proposed ministry financial plan for the FY22/23 biennium.

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Teacher Nathan Nolte, secretary

**Subject: Ministry financial plan (budget)**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 79-103

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) the Lord of the Church, even in a time burdened by the COVID-19 pandemic, has blessed our synod with generous financial offerings from congregations and individuals; and
- WHEREAS 2) the Synodical Council (SC) has thoughtfully, prayerfully studied the needs, opportunities, and resources that our gracious God has placed before our synod; and
- WHEREAS 3) the SC has assessed with cautious optimism the expected financial resources available through Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO), the Financial Stabilization Fund, individual gifts, and other sources of revenue; and
- WHEREAS 4) the SC has proposed a sound ministry financial plan for the FY22/FY23 Biennium that strikes a careful balance between expected financial needs and anticipated financial support for the work of the gospel; therefore be it
- Resolved, a) that we adopt the SC's ministry financial plan for the FY22/FY23 biennium; and be it further
- Resolved, b) that we encourage every congregation and member of WELS to support the gospel ministry entrusted to our synod; and be it finally
- Resolved, c) that we ask the Holy Spirit to continue to inspire his people to give as they have been given, in support of our synod's task to hold before the world the good news of Jesus.

Pastor Daniel Balge, chairman  
Teacher Nathan Nolte, secretary

## ADOPTED

# Committee #8: Home Missions

### **Subject: General report**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 105-112,182,183  
Report No. 01

It's not difficult to see Satan intended to bring the spread of the gospel over the past two years to a standstill. Given the nature of a pandemic, the difficulty of the varietal national, state, and local government directives, not to mention increased personal phobias, the sober question the reporter asks weighs heavy, "Yet, not many would have faulted Home Missions had there been a sabbatical from [Jesus'] directive in 2020, would they?"

We praise God for the faithful and even fruitful work of the Board for Home Missions (BHM). Instead of standing still, it stood firm in sound doctrine and practice. Static plans became dynamic, adjusting to meet ministry needs using online technology. In this way ongoing ministry programs were maintained and supported, such as the Mission Program Support Agreements and the Vicars in Mission Settings Program.

Even when timing wasn't appropriate to act on starting missions, extensive planning took place so that the BHM could act when needed. We thank God for opening a door for five missions to begin in 2020, another in Oregon, and in 2021 four additional missions, as well as the ongoing work with 124 other mission situations. Organizing the COVID-19 community outreach grants was a creative way for missions to rise to the occasion and strive to meet neighbor needs.

We also saw the fruit of these meetings in the memorial on pages 182 and 183. Starting 100 new missions and 75 new or enhanced ministries [over ten years] beginning in 2023 is a remarkable goal. It is clearly something that will involve all areas of WELS, not just the BHM. Questions of management, available pastors, finances, and recruiting at schools and congregations come to mind. We are confident these are questions our synodical leaders take seriously and are working diligently to address. We are also confident that because the goal is in line with Scripture, it is an effort the Lord of the Church will bless. We are in agreement with the spirit of the memorial and if approved, pray we reach and exceed it.

In addition to the general report and memorial, our committee was asked to give input on the proposed pension plan. We sifted the documents and videos put out by synod officials. After several meetings, members of the committee came to view the pension plan as a benefit for WELS workers and hoped to see it implemented.

Pastor Aaron Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Steven Bremer, secretary

### **Subject: 100 new missions and 75 new or enhanced ministries in North America**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 182,183  
Resolution No. 01

WHEREAS 1) our God revealed his love for fallen humankind when he promised to send a Savior to redeem and restore Adam and Eve and all their descendants to himself; and

- WHEREAS 2) our God in love kept his promise when “he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16); and
- WHEREAS 3) our God, in the person of the God-Man Jesus Christ, carried out his saving mission by living a perfect life, by suffering and dying to pay for the sins of all people, and then by rising from the dead in glorious victory; and
- WHEREAS 4) our God showed his desire that this good news be proclaimed throughout the world when he gave to his disciples of all time the important responsibility and the joyous privilege of being his ambassadors to carry the message of reconciliation to the world (Matthew 28 and 2 Corinthians 5); and
- WHEREAS 5) our God has graciously allowed the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to exist as a visible body of believers in Christ so that in 2025 we will be able to celebrate 175 years of his grace to us; and
- WHEREAS 6) recent times and events around the world, and especially in North America, have revealed once again that many of our fellow citizens, neighbors, friends, and relatives are searching in vain for lasting peace, comfort, stability, and relief from anxieties and fears; and
- WHEREAS 7) we desire to share the good news of forgiveness and deliverance through our Savior Jesus Christ, the one solution for the world’s problems and everyone’s true need for this life and eternity; and
- WHEREAS 8) the Board for Home Missions encourages all of our congregations and members to be mission minded, outreach focused, and aware of the help and encouragement available from WELS Commission on Evangelism to reach with the gospel those in our country previously mentioned (see “Whereas 6”); and
- WHEREAS 9) the establishment of a new mission church in a community is often, by God’s grace and with his blessing, an effective way to reach with the gospel those in our country previously mentioned (see “Whereas 6”) and bring them into our fellowship; therefore be it

Resolved, that being fully convinced that grace received is grace to share, we commemorate the 175-year milestone of our synod’s history (1850–2025) by challenging ourselves, under God’s grace and with his blessing, to set a goal of establishing 100 new missions and 75 new or enhanced ministries throughout North America over the next 10 years, starting July 1, 2023, under the auspices of Home Missions, working together with WELS areas of ministry and their traditional mission partners.

Pastor Aaron Mueller, chairman  
Teacher Steven Bremer, secretary

## **ADOPTED**

### **Subject: Gratitude for service**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 107

Resolution No. 02

WHEREAS 1) Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn served faithfully as the chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions for four year but needed to step down in 2020 when he accepted a call to serve as a home missions counselor; and

WHEREAS 2) Rev. Mark Gabb is now serving as chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions; therefore be it

Resolved, a) that WELS thank Uhlhorn for his service; and be it finally

Resolved, b) that WELS wish God's blessings on Gabb as he serves.

Pastor James Werner

## **ADOPTED**

# Committee #9: World Missions and Joint Mission Council

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

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 113-121

Report No. 01

The Board for World Missions and the Joint Mission Council continue to see the fruits of their labor by God's blessing. That faithful work has now planted and nurtured mission opportunities to share the gospel in at least 42 countries around the world. In addition, 17 mission fields remain under an exploratory mission status. God is using all of us right now to have an impact in a big way. God be praised for the work of the Holy Spirit in these ripe harvest fields!

Our committee wishes to offer special thanks for several areas of special blessing in this mission work:

- First, we note the blessing that the work of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations has provided as it seeks to assist in WELS' maintenance of relationships with sister synods.
- Second, we thank God for the fruits of *Academia Cristo* as it continues to reach thousands of gospel-deprived people in Latin American missions. Through the effective use of a mobile app and website, training and instruction in God's Word continues to take place in locations it may not otherwise.
- We commend and give thanks for the work of Pastor Glen Hieb now in retirement from the pastoral ministry and his position on the Board for World Missions. We ask God's blessing on Pastor Jon Schroeder as he now carries forward in this position on the Board for World Missions.
- Finally, we thank God for the blessing of all of our called and lay workers that are trained for and carry out mission work around the world, and we boldly ask God to continue to send pastors that are trained to continue this important work in the future.

Our committee wishes to call attention to several notable areas and topics of world mission work:

- The WELS Mission Journeys program is intended to connect WELS' "grassroots" churches to missions and mission work. These can serve home churches with great lessons learned from our mission settings that can be put into practice back in home congregations. The WELS Mission Journeys program is growing with many journeys already planned and booked for this year. Mr. Shannon Bohme serves as the contact person for this program.
- COVID-19 continues to be a great struggle for countries around the world outside of the United States where resources are limited. Please continue to pray for these people in areas of the world that continue to be greatly affected by this virus and the challenges that it has presented.
- There is a great need to encourage and train people of all cultures and ethnicities to serve as pastors and teachers.
- There would be great benefit in continuing to examine how WELS can work toward a more diverse representation among synodical leadership and at district conferences and synodical conventions. A greater racial or ethnic diversity in leadership and representation would assist us in connecting to our diverse world. It would also help us to hear and learn from those whom we currently serve or hope to reach out to.

Pastor Phil Huebner, chairman

Teacher Kristian Walta, secretary

# Committee #10: Ministerial Education

## **Subject: Gratitude for survival**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 123-156

Report No. 01

We give thanks to our gracious Lord for preserving the faculty, staff, and students at our ministerial education schools during the pandemic in the last biennium. The reports from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and Luther Preparatory School demonstrate not just survival but even growth during the last two years of schooling under difficult circumstances. We give thanks that the Lord of the Church continues to supply our synod with 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 appreciate the resources they put toward their education, and we want to increase financial assistance for them to lower their costs. Therefore, we 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.

Pastor Steven Pagels, chairman

Pastor Christopher Schroeder, secretary

## **Subject: Commendation for the efforts of Martin Luther College (MLC) to reduce educational debt**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 125-128

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) MLC has formed a working group to address student educational debt; and
- WHEREAS 2) MLC has set a goal of cutting student indebtedness in half in 10 years using the metric of starting salary (see BORAM, p. 127); and
- WHEREAS 3) MLC is considering other goals involving few or no educational loans being necessary in most cases; and
- WHEREAS 4) MLC is implementing many worthy efforts to achieve those goals; therefore be it
- Resolved, that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention commend MLC for its redoubled efforts to address the educational debt of its graduates.

Pastor Steven Pagels, chairman

Pastor Christopher Schroeder, secretary

## **ADOPTED**

## **Subject: Encouraging donors to help with financial assistance at Martin Luther College**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 125-128

Resolution No. 02

- WHEREAS 1) an endowment dedicated to financial assistance for Martin Luther College (MLC) students would help address student educational debt; and
- WHEREAS 2) such an endowment, especially if it approaches \$100 million (see BORAM, p. 128), might turn out to be critical if MLC must withdraw from the federal financial assistance program; and
- WHEREAS 3) raising such an endowment might be an appropriate follow up to the “Equipping Christian Witnesses” campaign; and
- WHEREAS 4) WELS Ministry of Christian Giving is making a special effort to identify major donors who want to support MLC; and
- WHEREAS 5) MLC has identified general student assistance as one of its greatest needs; and
- WHEREAS 6) identifying long-term solutions for funding MLC student financial assistance would be an appropriate follow up to the “Equipping Christian Witnesses” campaign; therefore be it
- Resolved, that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the WELS Ministry of Christian Giving and the Martin Luther College Mission Advancement office to continue seeking donors during and after the “Equipping Christian Witnesses” campaign who are willing to make major gifts to MLC student financial assistance.

Pastor Steven Pagels, chairman  
Pastor Christopher Schroeder, secretary

**ADOPTED**

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

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

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 31-37

Report No. 01

WELS Congregational Services exists to strengthen ministries of congregations and individuals so that the gospel can be shared to many more people. Because of the positive impact the use of these services can provide, we strongly encourage congregations and individuals within our synod to aggressively use these available resources to help reevaluate the way they carry out their work in a changing world. We challenge our synod’s circuit pastors and local conferences to emphasize the tools offered by Congregational Services as a way to help congregations become as effective as possible in sharing the gospel message in our changing world. We strongly encourage all convention delegates—called workers and laymen—to become familiar with the resources that our church body has to offer and to encourage their use in their local congregations.

We believe that the world around us, and its rapidly changing circumstances, are an unprecedented opportunity for WELS members and ministries to reach out in new and exciting ways. We pray that Congregational Services will be used in more ways than ever and that God’s people would take advantage of its work and resources to the advancing of the gospel and the furthering of God’s kingdom.

We have high regard for the work done by Congregational Services, and we encourage our WELS members, pastors, and teachers to subscribe to Congregational Services’ website ([welscongregationalservices.net](http://welscongregationalservices.net)), explore the wide

variety of resources available, and receive automatic updates. The number of resources that are available on that website are steadily growing. These resources are prepared to be used “as is” or to be easily adapted for each unique congregational setting. We encourage the broad use of these materials by pastors, church leaders, and individuals.

We commend our synod leaders in charge of these services for providing materials that can greatly assist individual congregations and the synod as a whole. What a blessing it is to have workers who can devote their full-time ministry to planning and producing high-quality materials! We pray these leaders and commissions will continue to bless our church body. We also pray that the Lord will bless Congregational Services with adequate staffing, so that it can continue to support and assist our congregations and members to carry out the Great Commission.

### **Memorial 2021-03**

Growing in spiritual maturity is a noble goal and one that all in our church body would share. We feel this is the purpose and goal of our Congregational Counseling, Discipleship, and Evangelism Commissions. The gospel-centered materials produced by these commissions are readily available, and if they are used by individuals and congregations, spiritual maturity will certainly result under God’s blessing; therefore, we feel that no additional action is needed at this time.

### **Memorial 2021-05**

This memorial was discussed, and the committee feels that the items mentioned were already being addressed in the resources currently available online and through the new resources that are being created as mentioned in the 2021 *Book of Reports and Memorials*. While it is true that our Northwestern Publishing House has curricula in its *Christ Light* series designed for Sunday schools, we are excited to see that there will be a wide variety of resources for Sunday school programs available on the WELS Congregational Services website by summer 2022. We encourage congregations, pastors, and Sunday school coordinators to access these resources and find ways to improve their current Sunday school programs. It was agreed that no additional action is needed at this time.

Pastor Brian Hackmann, chairman

Teacher David Retzlaff, secretary

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

### **Subject: Floor committee report on Congregational Services (Commissions on Special Ministries and Worship)**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 38-43

Report No. 01

Floor Committee #12 commends Special Ministries for working to assist congregations to serve souls who face unique challenges.

We commend the WELS Health and Wellness Committee for its work to assist those who provide spiritual care and other assistance to individuals in care facilities and private homes. We recommend that this committee publicize the Samaritan Partners Caregiver Support program to further assist all caregivers.

We thank the WELS Military Services Committee for faithfully providing spiritual support to military personnel stationed here and abroad. We also commend it for doing its work so effectively on a very frugal budget.

We commend the WELS Prison Ministry for utilizing hundreds of volunteers to reach out to tens of thousands of incarcerated souls. We further commend this committee for performing its work within its modest means.

We commend the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry for promoting ways and providing encouragement for congregations and individuals to share the gospel with those having special education needs and developmental disabilities. We encourage this group to continue cooperating with Jesus Cares Ministries.



We commend the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for its work with congregations and individuals affected by hearing challenges to enhance their worship and provide other opportunities to grow in the Word of God.

We commend the Mission for the Visually Impaired for producing materials for worship and spiritual growth designed for visually-impaired individuals. We encourage it to continue developing its online audiobook library.

We commend the Care Committee for Called Workers for its work assisting calling bodies to meet the needs of their called workers. We encourage every calling entity to willingly use this committee's materials and resources to support those who share the gospel in our churches and schools.

We thank the Committee on Mental Health Needs for its work to network WELS and ELS mental healthcare professionals, encouraging them to grow in the art and practice of Christian counseling. We further commend two groups under this committee's auspices—Conquerors through Christ and Freedom for the Captives—for providing ongoing support to those facing the temptations of pornography and the pain of child abuse, respectively.

Finally, we thank the Commission on Worship for its continuing work to enhance the worship experience through the development of music, liturgy, and worship-related items. We pray that the Lord bless the upcoming release of the new hymnal. We encourage congregations to use this committee's resources to introduce and promote the hymnal. We further encourage the commission to provide a forum to worship leaders for sharing ideas on introducing the new hymnal.

Teacher James Grasby, chairman  
Pastor Jonathan Rockhoff, secretary

**Subject: Military Services funding**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 39,40

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) the WELS Military Services Committee continues to provide spiritual services to WELS members and others who serve in the U.S. Armed Forces; and
- WHEREAS 2) the WELS Military Services Committee ministry plan includes expanding the office of national civilian chaplain to a full-time called position; and
- WHEREAS 3) WELS Military Services is currently funded primarily through designated gifts and grants; and
- WHEREAS 4) WELS is committed to serving WELS military members directly instead of through U.S. military chaplaincy; therefore be it

Resolved, that synodical funding be restored to WELS Military Services pending approval of funding by the Synodical Council.

Teacher James Grasby, chairman  
Pastor Jonathan Rockhoff, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Prison Ministry funding**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 40

Resolution No. 02

- WHEREAS 1) WELS Prison Ministry administers an extensive ministry-by-mail program and provides training opportunities for laypeople and pastors who would like to begin a local jail or prison ministry; and
- WHEREAS 2) WELS Prison Ministry is currently modestly subsidized with \$15,000 annually from WELS budgetary funds; and
- WHEREAS 3) WELS Prison Ministry no longer receives the majority of its funding from grants from Lutheran foundations and organizations; and

WHEREAS 4) WELS Prison Ministry will be forced to curtail its operations if unable to find increased support; therefore be it

Resolved, that synodical funding be increased to allow WELS Prison Ministry to continue to function without curtailing its current operations pending funding by the Synodical Council.

Teacher James Grasby, chairman  
Pastor Jonathan Rockhoff, secretary

#### **ADOPTED**

#### **Subject: Adoption of *Christian Worship 2021***

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 44, 172, 173; convention presentation by Rev. Michael Schultz, director of WELS Hymnal Project  
Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS the WELS Hymnal Project has presented to the synod a new hymnal for the glory of God and the edification of his people; therefore be it

Resolved, that WELS accept *Christian Worship 2021* as the WELS hymnal.

WELS President Mark Schroeder

#### **ADOPTED**

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

#### **Subject: Commission on Lutheran Schools**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 45,46  
Report No. 01

We give thanks for the blessings of Christian education and the work of the Commission for Lutheran Schools (CLS) as it faithfully works to fulfill its mission to guide and assist congregations in advancing the gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran schools. CLS daily provides services to our synod's 431 early childhood, elementary, and secondary school ministries with a gospel-focused, servant-minded, excellence-driven, and partnership-committed approach.

We recognize God's gracious blessings even as our school leaders, teachers, parents, and students have endured a very different and challenging time for Christian education. Amid the challenges that came with COVID-19, many of our schools were able to connect with more unchurched families and share the gospel with their children. Though early childhood followed the nationwide trend of lower enrollment, WELS elementary enrollment and Lutheran high school enrollment each grew by about one percent. Six of our districts experienced growth in enrollment, while six saw a decline. State and county guidelines had a lot to do with how students could be served.

CLS is to be commended for strengthening ministries through the following initiatives:

1. WELS Ministerial Growth and Evaluation Process—Training modules and materials are now available to assist the growth of all WELS teachers through a Ministry Development Plan. New teacher growth tools and evaluations are also now available.

2. *Telling the Next Generation: Utilizing Our Schools for Outreach*—The Commissions on Evangelism, Discipleship, and Lutheran Schools continue to offer one-day seminars focused on effective outreach practices for WELS schools and early childhood ministries. The presentations focus on the critical role of relationships and a planned and effective harvest strategy.
3. The 21st-Century Principal Initiative, Principal and Director Training Program, Early Childhood Emerging Leader Cohort, and Principal and Director Apprentice Program—The shortage of principals and leaders in our schools has grown to over 10 percent. These initiatives are effectively addressing both the need for well-trained school leaders and the shortage of school leaders.
4. WELS School Accreditation and consulting services—WELSSA, our nationally recognized WELS School Accreditation program, continues to grow. There are 145 WELS schools currently accredited and 15 schools in candidacy, that is, working through the process for the first time.
5. Microschools and online virtual schools—CLS is seeking to capitalize on the bimodal teaching and learning that emerged out of necessity during the COVID-19 outbreak. A pilot microschool is planned for the 2022–23 school year in the southeast quadrant of our nation. CLS has obtained accreditation of a 9th-grade WELS virtual school, with plans of obtaining accreditation of higher and lower grades in the future.

At a time when we face a shortage of educational leaders, teachers, and pastors, we encourage our congregations to actively promote the teaching ministry and the need for educational leaders, including principal and early childhood ministry directors, among their congregational youth. Seventy-five percent of WELS congregations do not enjoy the benefit of an elementary school and/or area Lutheran high school. Pastors and members of those congregations are also encouraged to identify and encourage youth in their Sunday schools, youth groups, and homeschool settings to consider ministry. Every congregation member can help recruit students eager to pursue gospel ministry at Martin Luther College—students who might become your next pastor, teacher, or staff minister.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented opportunities for many of our WELS schools to make in-roads into the community. Because of these opportunities, many non-members have enrolled their children in our schools, and it is a great blessing to be able to proclaim the gospel to these children every day. Typically WELS schools have been satisfied with just serving the child, but a more substantial goal would be to eventually bring that non-member family into the congregation. This usually only happens when there is a really strong, aggressive harvest strategy. The committee encourages WELS schools to participate in *Telling the Next Generation* to learn how to implement a harvest strategy in what may be a couple of years of tremendous opportunity to position our Lutheran schools to reach unchurched and dischurched people.

Over the past eight years, WELS has averaged about four school closings per year. Some of those closings are because two schools joined to become one. Sometimes a school closes because they have gone a number of years without a teacher or a school leader. Thanks to a grant, Lutheran Schools was able to add recently retired principal James Sievert to the Lutheran Schools team as a part-time called school consultant during the biennium. School consulting exists to partner with congregational consulting to help support the overall ministry of a congregation.

May the Lord continue to bless the efforts of CLS to guide and assist congregations in advancing the gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran schools.

Teacher Scott Schmudlach, chairman

Teacher Robert Dusseau, secretary

## Committee #14: Support Services

### **Subject: Overview**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 67-74

Report No. 01

Support Services encompasses Technology, Financial Services, Human Resources, and Facility Services.

## **Technology**

WELS Technology has focused on infrastructure, data, security, and resource availability over the past two years.

*Infrastructure:* WELS Technology uses Microsoft technologies for many of its needs. Microsoft Teams and transitioning to cloud-based servers allowed staff to continue working during the COVID-19 “safer at home” governmental order. There are now “Team Rooms” and a “Zoom Room” at the Center for Mission and Ministry. Another notable change is equipping employees with laptop computers, moving away from desktop models.

*Data:* Most of the synod data is housed by WELSource. The former platform, Progress, was retired in 2020. WELSource is used for congregational and school statistical reporting, called worker data maintenance, pension plan administration, teacher evaluations and assessments, and much more.

*Security:* The synod maintains sensitive information about called workers and institutions. The synod-owned databases have never been compromised. The security firm FRSecure has been contracted to conduct a security review, and while security mitigation measures have begun, they may not be completed for multiple years. A security analyst is being hired to help coordinate and conduct regular security audits for each WELS entity. The committee commends these steps and encourages WELS technology to continue its work to protect sensitive information and to communicate to the Synodical Council regularly.

*Resource availability:* Connecting people with digital resources is an important part of the scope of WELS Technology. Many different websites and applications have been updated and made available, one of the most noteworthy being the WELS Retirement Program Comparison Calculator.

Security improvement is a major challenge and focus in the coming years. Additional resources are needed at the four synodical schools and Northwestern Publishing House to help combat the increasingly intense and frequent cyber threats. WELS Technology continues to coordinate with other areas of ministry and mission fields to support ministry initiatives and equip them with the necessary digital tools.

## **Financial Services**

Financial Services recently went through a significant transition as Mr. Kyle Egan became the new WELS chief financial officer (CFO). Mr. Todd Poppe had served for 16 years and retired in 2020. Other notable happenings of the past year include obtaining a \$2.7 million PPP loan, communicating female called worker eligibility for parsonage allowance, and monitoring the support forecast and financial plan during challenging economic times.

A list of upcoming initiatives include: completing a request for proposal process for the synod’s banking services, researching alternatives to the general ledger system to improve efficiency, and researching and implementing new accounting standards.

## **Human Resources**

Currently, the WELS Human Resources staff of two has been working on the following initiatives: 1) staffing ten lay worker positions, 2) providing guidance through the pandemic, 3) providing guidance regarding the updated IRS code interpretation, which allows female called workers to utilize the parsonage allowance, 4) working with congregations and WELS district presidents on personnel matters and policy issues, 5) providing guidance for Affordable Care Act (ACA) compliance, 6) assisting in filling board/committee openings for positions appointed by the Synodical Council, and 7) helping secure religious worker visas.

Looking ahead, future initiatives include: 1) work to facilitate a safe return for full staff and visitors to the Center for Mission and Ministry, 2) perform due diligence on the vendors and systems in place within the HR structure, 3) work with our areas of ministry and synodical schools in coordinating timely information and support for our workers, 4) facilitate learning and development programs for the management and staff of the synod entities, 5) provide continued training for synod leaders, 6) review and evaluate HR policies and procedures, and 7) continue providing support to WELS in HR matters.

## **Facility Services**

Overall the Center for Mission and Ministry grounds are in good condition. The lower level accommodates the synod archives, the WELS visitor center, and Northwestern Publishing House.

A Building Fund Policy has been created to ensure funds exist for maintenance and improvements. Currently the fund has nearly \$400,000. The parking lot and HVAC system may need to be replaced in the next three to five years. The replacement of the parking lot has been included within the ministry financial plan for a fiscal year 2023 project funded through the Building Fund.

Teacher Benjamin Schramm, chairman  
Pastor Joel Kluender, secretary

**Subject: Expression of gratitude**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 71  
Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) Mr. Todd Poppe has served faithfully as WELS chief financial officer (CFO) for the previous 16 years; and
- WHEREAS 2) Mr. Todd Poppe is now retired and no longer WELS CFO, having been replaced by Mr. Kyle Egan; therefore be it
- Resolved. a) that our synod in convention thank the Lord and Mr. Poppe for his years of faithful service; and be it finally
- Resolved. b) that we praise God for the blessings given through Mr. Poppe's work, and ask the Lord to bless Mr. Poppe in his retirement.

Teacher Benjamin Schramm, chairman  
Pastor Joel Kluender, secretary

**ADOPTED**

## Committee #15: Subsidiaries

**Subject: WELS Historical Institute**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 157-159  
Report No. 01

As noted in BORAM, "the year 2021 marks the fortieth anniversary of WELS Historical Institute." The committee wishes to thank all those past and present who have been involved in the preservation of our WELS history through the work of the WELS Historical Institute. Since WELS Historical Institute is self-funded through "membership dues, gifts, and memorials provided by our constituency and friends" and, at present, numbers only around 200 members, the committee would encourage the membership of WELS to consider the wide variety of ways they can support WELS Historical Institute, including, but not limited to, membership in the institute, monetary gifts, donation of items for the WELS archives, tours of the WELS museum at Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, and making use of its online presence at its website and on Facebook.

Together with those currently involved with WELS Historical Institute, the committee notes these three items:

- The 500th anniversary of both Luther's stand before the Diet of Worms and the beginning of Luther's translation of the Bible into the German language.
- The conclusion, with thanks, of service as long-time secretary of WELS Historical Institute by Ms. Naomi Plocher.

- The goal of WELS Historical Institute to “completely restore to its 1863 appearance” Salem Lutheran Landmark Church in time for the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Lutheran Church on June 25, 2030.

Pastor John Koelpin, chairman  
Teacher Scott Sievert, secretary

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

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 160,161  
Report No. 02

The committee notes, with thanks to God, the many years that the WELS Church Extension Fund has provided loans and grants for mission expansion to congregations under the direction of WELS Home Missions and to mission-minded self-supporting congregations.

Currently WELS CEF finds itself in a robust financial position. As a result, WELS CEF is seeking opportunities from mission and self-supporting congregations to put its assets to work for the greater good of gospel outreach.

Pastor John Koelpin, chairman  
Teacher Scott Sievert, secretary

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

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 161-164  
Report No. 03

The committee agrees with past convention proceedings that “WELS Foundation, Inc., and WELS Investment Funds, Inc., may be two of WELS’ best kept secrets.” We would encourage the delegates of this convention to read the reports from these subsidiaries on the pages listed above and to visit their booths in the convention hall. In addition, we encourage the constituency of WELS to make use of the informational and educational materials available from both subsidiaries and to consider engaging the financial opportunities they offer.

The committee would highlight, in particular, the tax-wise ways to make major gifts of assets, through WELS Foundation, to support local and national ministries. These include legacy gifts, such as endowment funds and donor advised funds, and gifts that provide supplemental retirement income to the donor and/or their children.

WELS Investment Funds provides cost-effective, professionally managed investment portfolios exclusively for WELS and WELS-affiliated ministries. By pooling our God-given talents and resources, we can take advantage of lower cost, institutionally priced investment opportunities that are not available to smaller investment accounts. As more and more congregations and WELS-affiliated ministries invest in WELS Investment Funds, the cost-reduction benefits also increase. It’s another way we can help support each other.

With greater participation from WELS members and ministries, WELS Foundation and WELS Investment Funds can become even more impactful sources of ongoing financial support to carry out the mission of the Church.

Pastor John Koelpin, chairman  
Teacher Scott Sievert, secretary

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

## **Subject: Bible studies for women**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 171

Report No. 01

We commend Northwestern Publishing House for its growing focus on producing Bible studies specifically for women, and for the approach of the WELS Women's Ministry Committee that these materials be trustworthy, Christ-centered, and authentic. This important and timely area of ministry is deserving of such emphasis.

Pastor Steve Daley, chairman

Pastor James Panning, secretary

## **Subject: Pandemic response**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 172

Report No. 02

We are thankful to our gracious God for the steps taken by Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These steps have allowed NPH to continue providing meaningful support that has addressed the needs of our churches, schools, and WELS members. These steps include providing digital worship, devotional, and Bible study resources; launching Faith Care Packages; discounting certain materials; extending payment terms for churches and schools; offering wellness supplies; and more.

Pastor Steve Daley, chairman

Pastor James Panning, secretary

## **Subject: Curriculum 22:6**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 173

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) Proverbs 22:6 enjoins us to "start children off on the way they should go" so that "when they are old they will not turn from it;" and
- WHEREAS 2) a religion curriculum is an important tool for effectively training our children in and equipping them with God's Word; and
- WHEREAS 3) there is a need for a religion curriculum that is forward-focused to address significant anticipated changes in classroom composition, teaching methodology, learning styles, and technology; and
- WHEREAS 4) a project of this scale and scope will require a significant capital investment; therefore be it
- Resolved. a) that Northwestern Publishing House be encouraged to pursue to completion the Curriculum 22:6 project; and be it finally
- Resolved. b) that Northwestern Publishing House seek supplemental funding as needed.

Pastor Steve Daley, chairman

Pastor James Panning, secretary

## **ADOPTED**

# Committee #17: Christian Aid and Relief

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

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

Report No. 01

We thank our gracious God for the blessing of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. This compassion ministry brings relief to those suffering from natural, medical, and financial disasters. God often uses these settings to create gospel ministry opportunities. As a result, we are happy to report the intentional efforts by WELS Christian Aid and Relief to act as a bridge to local congregations and share with those they serve the saving message of Christ crucified. Furthermore, we support and encourage the strategic goal of establishing disaster relief teams in every district. We believe this will increase awareness and grow lay involvement in the work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. May God continue to bless those who serve and are being served through WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

Pastor Carlos Leyrer, chairman

Pastor Brady Coleman, secretary

# Committee #18: Constitutional Matters

**Subject: Conference of Presidents, terminology regarding ministry certification**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 175,176

Resolution No. 01

WHEREAS 1) the IRS states that in order to receive the tax benefit of a parsonage allowance, a church worker must be ordained, licensed, or “ministry certified”; and

WHEREAS 2) the term “synodically certified” is no longer used by Martin Luther College or the Commission on Lutheran Schools; therefore be it

Resolved. that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposed revisions in Section 1.00 (c), Section 1.00 (d), and Section 3.10 (a) of the Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman

Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Conference of Presidents, administrators**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 176

Resolution No. 02

WHEREAS with today’s communications tools, the timeline for calling the positions of the administrators for



Home Missions, World Missions, and Ministerial Education can be shortened, providing greater ease and timeliness in calling for these positions; therefore be it

Resolved. that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposed revisions in Section 5.60 (d) of the Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

#### **ADOPTED**

#### **Subject: Conference of Presidents, calling procedure**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 176,177

Resolution No. 03

WHEREAS 1) the governing boards of Luther Preparatory School and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, the two preparatory high schools of the synod, have requested a change in the calling process for their schools to be similar to that used by area Lutheran high schools; and

WHEREAS 2) this proposed bylaw revision retains the current calling process at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the two terminal ministerial education schools of the synod, but changes the calling process at the two prep schools to be similar to that of area Lutheran high schools; and

WHEREAS 3) deleting the phrase “to the ministerial schools” in Section 6.48 (a), results in a lack of clarity as to which calling bodies are involved; and

WHEREAS 4) the addition of the phrase “In the case of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary” in Section 6.48 (b) provides necessary clarity for the proposed bylaw revision; and

WHEREAS 5) with today’s communications tools, the time frame for nominating a candidate or candidates to Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary can be made shorter; therefore be it

Resolved. a) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention reject the recommended deletion of the phrase “to the ministerial schools” in Section 6.48 (a) of the Bylaws; and be it further

Resolved. b) that the delegates of the synod convention approve the addition of the phrase “In the case of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary” in Section 6.48 (b) of the Bylaws; and be it further

Resolved. c) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposal to shorten the time frame for nominating candidates to Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 20 to 10 days in Section 6.48 (c) of the Bylaws; and be it finally

Resolved. d) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposed change to the calling of professors at the prep schools in Section 6.48 (d) of the Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

#### **ADOPTED**

#### **Subject: Conference of Presidents, Synod Board of Appeals**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 177

Resolution No. 04

WHEREAS the proposal to change the term length of the Synod Board of Appeals from six years to four years, and with the ability to succeed themselves twice instead of once, is consistent with other elected and appointed positions; therefore be it

Resolved, that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposed revisions in Section 8.10 (a) of the Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Conference of Presidents, District Bylaws, Ministry of Christian Giving**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 177

Resolution No. 05

WHEREAS the proposal to change the term length of those who serve on the Ministry of Christian Giving from six years to four years, and with the ability to succeed themselves twice instead of once, is consistent with other elected and appointed positions; therefore be it

Resolved, that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposed revisions in Article XVI, Section 1 of the District Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Conference of Presidents, District Bylaws, Committee on Constitutional Matters**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 177

Resolution No. 06

WHEREAS 1) the proposal to change the term length of those who serve on the Committee on Constitutional Matters from six years to four years, and with the ability to succeed themselves twice instead of once, is consistent with other elected and appointed positions; and

WHEREAS 2) the proposal to delete the sentence, "The term of one member shall expire every two years" would cause this bylaw to be further out of sync with other bylaws that have been previously revised to say, "Terms shall be staggered;" therefore be it

Resolved, a) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention reject the proposal to delete the sentence "The term of one member shall expire every two years" in Article XIX, Section 1 of the District Bylaws; and be it finally

Resolved, b) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposal to change the term length of those who serve on the Committee of Constitutional Matters from six years to four years, with the ability to succeed themselves twice instead of once, in Article XIX, Section 1 of the District Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Office of the President, District Bylaws, District Board of Appeals**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 177

Resolution No. 07

WHEREAS the proposal to change the term length of those who serve on the District Board of Appeals from six years to four years, and with the ability to succeed themselves twice instead of once, is consistent with other elected and appointed positions; therefore be it

Resolved. that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the proposed revisions in Article XXII, Section 1 of the District Bylaws.

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

**ADOPTED**

**Subject: Office of the President, Unfunded Priority List**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 177,178

Resolution No. 08

- WHEREAS 1) the requirement for the synod convention to approve an unfunded priority list was originally a component of the previous “decision package” budget model, in which all areas of ministry divided their work into prioritized discrete packages, all of which were requested and some of which were funded; and
- WHEREAS 2) prioritized discrete packages that were not funded were to be put on an unfunded priority list adopted by the convention; and
- WHEREAS 3) in recent years, the unfunded priority list simply became a list of dollar amounts for areas of ministry (e.g. \$100,000 for World Missions, \$100,000 for Home Missions, \$150,000 for Ministerial Education, etc.) rather than specific programs that had already been identified; and
- WHEREAS 4) under these circumstances, there is no purpose or advantage for the synod in convention to adopt a list of vague dollar amounts; and
- WHEREAS 5) if additional funding becomes available, the Synodical Council has the ability to allocate that funding based on the most current pressing needs identified by areas of ministry; and
- WHEREAS 6) ministry needs are always changing, and the Synodical Council already has the authority to make changes to the convention-adopted unfunded priority list; therefore be it
- Resolved. a) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve deleting Section 5.30 (d) and Section 5.30 (g), which deal with the unfunded priority list; and be it finally
- Resolved. b) that the delegates of the 2021 synod convention approve the relettering of Section 5.30 (e) through (h) of the Bylaws to become Section 5.30 (d) through (f).

Pastor Glenn Schwanke, chairman  
Pastor Johnold Strey, secretary

**ADOPTED**

## Committee #19: Benefit Plans and Pension Proposal

**Subject: Proposed changes to WELS Pension Plan**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 168-170

Resolution No. 01

- WHEREAS 1) the WELS Retirement Benefit Strategy Committee (the “Committee”) was appointed by the Synodical Council in 2017 and has done extensive research on the best retirement benefit options for WELS called workers and ministries; and
- WHEREAS 2) the Committee recommends a change from the current WELS Pension Plan (the “Pension Plan”) to a defined contribution plan structure for workers’ retirement benefits; and
- WHEREAS 3) the Committee’s recommended changes have been reviewed and endorsed by the Conference of Presidents and the Synodical Council, and the Synodical Council is proposing these changes to the 2021 synod convention; and
- WHEREAS 4) the proposed defined contribution plan structure will provide meaningful contributions for workers’ retirement benefits; and
- WHEREAS 5) the proposed defined contribution plan structure was designed, based on actuarial assumptions, with the intention of providing each worker with a similar or greater retirement benefit than the current Pension Plan benefit; and
- WHEREAS 6) the costs for the proposed defined contribution plan structure will be more stable over time for calling bodies compared to the costs for the Pension Plan; and
- WHEREAS 7) it is desired and beneficial that our synod’s calling bodies and called workers continue to walk together by sponsoring and participating in a unified program for workers’ retirement benefits; therefore be it
- Resolved. a) that the Synodical Council shall be authorized to freeze new participation and benefit accruals under the current Pension Plan on December 31, 2021 (or later if the Synodical Council determines that a later effective date is advisable), meaning no additional pension benefits will accrue and no individuals will become new participants; but all pension benefits earned by eligible workers through December 31, 2021 (or later, if the Synodical Council chooses a later effective date) will be paid according to the terms of that plan; and be it further
- Resolved. b) that the Synodical Council shall be authorized to fully vest benefit accruals under the current Pension Plan on December 31, 2021 (or later if the Synodical Council determines that a later effective date is advisable); and be it further
- Resolved. c) that the Synodical Council shall be authorized to establish a new defined contribution plan structure effective January 1, 2022 (or later if the Synodical Council determines that a later effective date is advisable) that is substantially similar to the defined contribution plan structure that has been proposed to the 2021 synod convention under which the group of employees who were eligible to participate in the Pension Plan will be provided retirement contributions (the “New Defined Contribution Plan Structure”); and be it further
- Resolved. d) that the Synodical Council shall be authorized to include the New Defined Contribution Plan Structure as part of the WELS Shepherd Plan or as a new, separate tax-qualified defined contribution retirement plan, as determined by the Synodical Council in its discretion; and be it further
- Resolved. e) that effective January 1, 2022, the Synodical Council shall be authorized to require all WELS calling bodies to join the WELS Shepherd Plan (and, to the extent the Synodical Council determines it is advisable, the new, separate tax-qualified defined contribution retirement plan) and to be treated as a single employer in conjunction with other WELS entities for certain legal purposes, if the Synodical Council determines such treatment is advisable for the administration of the New Defined Contribution Plan Structure; and be it further
- Resolved. f) that effective January 1, 2022, the Synodical Council shall be authorized to require all WELS calling bodies to attest and confirm that the WELS Shepherd Plan, the frozen WELS Pension Plan and, to the extent the Synodical Council determines it is advisable, the new, separate tax-qualified defined contribution retirement plan are the only employer-sponsored retirement plans currently available to workers (or a subset of such workers as determined by the Synodical Council) of such

WELS calling body if the Synodical Council determines such requirements are advisable for administrative or legal compliance purposes; and be it further

Resolved. g) that effective January 1, 2022, all calling bodies (i) agree to assume responsibility for the costs of the New Defined Contribution Plan Structure, as revised or amended from time to time, (ii) hereby ratify their continuing obligation for the continued costs associated with the Pension Plan, and (iii) agree that such calling bodies shall be billed on a periodic (currently quarterly) basis with respect to such costs as determined by the Synodical Council (or its designees); and be it further

Resolved. h) that once established, the Synodical Council shall have the authority to revise the New Defined Contribution Plan Structure and amend the related plans as it deems necessary or appropriate to support the ongoing work and mission of the synod; and be it further

Resolved. i) that the Synodical Council is hereby authorized and empowered to take any actions it deems reasonably necessary and appropriate to implement these resolutions and shall be authorized and empowered to make such changes to the New Defined Contribution Plan Structure, and to amend the WELS Pension Plan and the WELS Shepherd Plan, as it deems reasonably necessary or appropriate to implement these resolutions; and be it finally

Resolved. j) that the 2021 synod convention hereby approve the proposed retirement plan changes and recommend that the Synodical Council take the actions described above.

Pastor Adam Mueller, chairman

Pastor Caleb Davisson, secretary

**ADOPTED**

## Committee #20: Steering

### **Subject: Elections**

Report No. 01

This year elections were held before the convention, and all delegates had the opportunity to submit nominations and to vote for every office electronically. The election process began on June 21 and concluded on July 13. The election results were as follows:

### **First Vice President of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

Rev. James Huebner

### **Recording Secretary of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**

Rev. Robert Pasbrig

### **Synodical Council pastor-at-large member**

Rev. Joel Heckendorf

Rev. Joel Jenswold

### **Synodical Council teacher-at-large member**

Mr. Thomas Plitzuweit

**Board for World Missions chairman**

Rev. Paul Janke

**Board for Home Missions, chairman**

Rev. Mark Gabb

**Board for Ministerial Education member, pastor**

Rev. John Bortulin

**Board for Ministerial Education member, teacher or staff minister**

Mr. James Henrickson

**Board for Ministerial Education member, layman**

Mr. Adam Zastrow

**Martin Luther College Governing Board, chairman**

Rev. Aaron Mueller

**Commission on Evangelism, chairman**

Rev. Douglas Tomhave

**Commission on Lutheran Schools, chairman**

Mr. Ryan Wiechmann

**Commission on Special Ministries, chairman**

Rev. Joel Gaertner

**Commission on Discipleship, chairman**

Rev. John Boggs

**Board of Appeals member, pastor**

Rev. Paul Zell

**Board of Appeals member, teacher or staff minister**

Mr. Steven Rosenbaum

**Board of Appeals member, layman**

Mr. Gregory Galler

Pastor Jon Buchholz, chairman

# 2021 memorial disposition

<b>Memorial</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Disposition</b>	<b>Reference</b>
2021-01	Statement on divorce	Mr. Glenn M. Brunner, Kewaskum, Wis.	#2 Conference of Presidents	Addressed in a committee report	Report 02-GR-04
2021-02	Reevaluation of the calling process	Rev. Peter Prange, Kenosha, Wis.	#2 Conference of Presidents	Addressed in a committee resolution	Resolution 02-03
2021-03	Growing our spiritual maturity	Mr. Glenn M. Brunner, Kewaskum, Wis.	#11 Congregational Services A	Addressed in a committee report	Report 11-GR-01
2021-04	The spiritual family			Printed in error; not considered by the convention	
2021-05	Declare 2022 the year of the Sunday school in WELS	Mr. Carl W. Toepel, Howards Grove, Wis.	#11 Congregational Services A	Addressed in a committee report	Report 11-GR-01
2021-06	100 new missions and 75 new or enhanced ministries in North America	WELS Board for Home Missions	#8 Home Missions	Addressed in a committee resolution	Resolution 08-01





# Revisions to the WELS Bylaws

The 2021 synod in convention passed the following revisions to the WELS Bylaws (see the report of the Constitutional Matters Floor Committee, pp. 44-47 of this book). Additions are underlined. Deletions are indicated by a strikethrough. These bylaw changes were recommended by the Conference of Presidents and the Office of the President. Background rationale is provided for each recommended change. Only those areas of the bylaws recommended for change and adopted by the 2019 synod convention delegates are included here; those not being amended are not printed in this recommendation but can be found in the synod Constitution and Bylaws if reference is needed. For a complete, updated copy of the WELS Constitution and Bylaws, visit [wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports](http://wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports) or contact the President's Office at 414-256-3202 for a printed copy.

## Synod Bylaws

### Recommendation #1

*Background: The term "synodically certified" is no longer used by Martin Luther College or the Commission on Lutheran Schools. This change reflects the term currently being used.*

#### DEFINITIONS

##### Section 1.00

(c) "Teacher" means anyone who is ~~synodically~~ ministry certified and listed on the most current synodical rosters of "men teachers—active" or "men teachers—retired" who is holding a permanent call, except that teachers who still have a program of education to complete and female teachers listed in the most current synodical roster are also included in Sections 8.20 and 8.60.

(d) "Staff Minister" means any male who is ~~synodically~~ ministry certified and listed on the most current synodical roster of "Staff Ministers—active" or "Staff Ministers—retired" who is holding a permanent call. Male staff ministers are included in the male teachers category in all articles and bylaws. Male staff ministers who still have a program of education to complete and female staff ministers listed in the most current synodical roster titled "Female Staff Ministers—active" and "Female Staff Ministers—retired" are also included in Sections 8.20 and 8.60.

##### Section 3.10

##### Conventions: Delegates

(a) At conventions of the synod, districts shall be represented by three classes of voting delegates: congregation representatives (lay delegates), pastors, and male ~~synodically~~ ministry certified teachers. Only these official delegates shall be entitled to make motions and to vote at the convention of the synod.

### Recommendation #2

*Background: With today's communications tools, the timeline for calling these positions can be made shorter, providing greater ease and timeliness in calling for these positions.*

##### Section 5.60

##### Administrators

(a) The administrators for Home Missions, World Missions, and Ministerial Education shall be accountable and reportable to their boards and to the president.

(b) Administrators shall be advisory, non-voting members of the boards under which they serve.

(c) Administrators shall execute the decisions of the boards and/or commissions under which they serve.

(d) Administrators of the synod shall be called in the following manner. Notice of a vacancy shall be published on the official internet site of WELS and/or to congregations by mail or e-mail, and all pastors, professors, male teachers, congregations, and voting members of congregations shall be invited to nominate candidates within ~~20~~ 10 days from the date of publication. The list of candidates shall be published on the official internet site of WELS and/or to congregations by mail or e-mail, and the calling board shall call from the published list no earlier than ~~30~~ 20 days from the date of publication.

### **Recommendation #3**

*Background: This change keeps the calling process at the two terminal ministerial education schools but changes the calling process at the two prep schools to be similar to that of area Lutheran high schools.*

#### **Section 6.48 Calling Procedure**

(a) The calling of professors to the ministerial schools shall be conducted by the governing board.

(b) In the case of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the governing board of the school in which a vacancy may have occurred shall publish such vacancy on the official internet site of WELS and/or to congregations by mail and shall request the nomination of qualified candidates.

(c) All pastors, male professors, male teachers, congregations, and voting members of congregations shall be entitled to nominate a candidate or candidates within ~~20~~ 10 days from the date of publication of the vacancy. The submitted names shall be published on the official Internet site of WELS and/or to congregations by mail or e-mail the first business day after nominations close. The calling board may issue a request for additional candidates at any time. Additional names may be submitted to or by the president of the district in which the school is located at any time.

(d) In the case of the prep schools, the president of the district in which the school is located shall prepare a call list for the school's governing board. Individuals or congregations may submit names to the district president for consideration as he assembles the call list.

~~(d)~~ (e) Presidents of the ministerial schools shall be called in accordance with the procedure for the calling of administrators of the synod as outlined in section 5.60.

### **Recommendation #4**

*Background: Changes terms of Board of Appeals members to four-year terms with the ability to succeed themselves twice. This is consistent with other elected and appointed positions.*

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

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

## **District Bylaws**

### **Recommendation #5**

*Background: Changes terms of district Ministry of Christian Giving members to four-year terms with the ability to succeed themselves twice. This is consistent with other elected and appointed positions.*

#### **ARTICLE XVI Ministry of Christian Giving**

**Section 1.** There shall be a commission entitled "Ministry of Christian Giving" consisting of no more than six pastors and laymen, each appointed by the district president for a term of ~~six~~ four years. Commission members may succeed themselves ~~once~~ twice. The chairman of the commission shall be appointed by the district president. The president shall be an advisory member of the commission.

## **Recommendation #6**

*Background: Changes terms of district Committee on Constitutional Matters to four-year terms with the ability to succeed themselves twice. This is consistent with other elected and appointed positions.*

### **ARTICLE XIX**

#### **Committee on Constitutional Matters**

**Section 1.** There shall be a committee on constitutional matters composed of three members appointed by the president and vice presidents. The term of office shall be ~~six~~ four years. The term of one member shall expire every two years. A member may succeed himself ~~once~~ twice.

## **Recommendation #7**

*Background: Changes terms of district Board of Appeals members to four-year terms with the ability to succeed themselves twice. This is consistent with other elected and appointed positions.*

### **Constitution for the Districts**

#### **ARTICLE XXII**

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

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

## **Recommendation #8**

*Background: The requirement for the convention to approve an unfunded priority list was originally a component of the old decision package budget model, in which all areas of ministry divided their work into prioritized discrete packages, all of which were requested, and some of which were funded. Those that were not funded were to be put on an unfunded priority list adopted by the convention.*

*That budgeting process, which was discontinued in 2003, did not take reserves, special funds, or programs funded by special appeals into account as the current budgeting process does.*

*In addition, while the current bylaws require the ministry financial plan to include an unfunded priority list, that list often features generic items rather than specific programs. And, even when unfunded programs are specific in nature, priorities of ministry can and do change after the list is adopted by the convention. The Synodical Council monitors and identifies unfunded priorities on an ongoing basis, and when funds do become available, it approves funding for what it has judged to be the highest priority at the time.*

*In addition, areas of ministry are well aware that they can decide to fund continuing projects by a prudent use of reserves and can request Synodical Council approval for a modification of their plan if funding is available.*

*The rest of the description of Establishing the Ministry Financial Plan in Bylaw Section 5.30 still applies to how we operate today. It would not be harmed by the removal of subpoints (d) and (g). Since the Synodical Council has already resolved to change the way it develops the unfunded priority list, removing the current requirement of the bylaws seems to be a necessary first step.*

*Therefore, it is recommended that Bylaw Section 5.30 of the WELS Constitution be modified by the removal of subsections (d) and (g).*

#### **Section 5.30 Establishing the Ministry Financial Plan**

(a) The Synodical Council shall establish a support forecast which shall serve as a basis for determining operating support available for ministry. The forecast for Congregation Mission Offerings shall be established in consultation with the Conference of Presidents.

(b) In the year in which the convention meets, every area of ministry, ministerial education school, and Ministry Support subsidiary, through its respective administrator or board, shall present to the president its complete ministry financial plan for the next two fiscal years. The plan shall include the use of both operating and special funds, as well

as anticipated changes in reserves. The president shall then present a comprehensive ministry financial plan to the Synodical Council.

(c) The Synodical Council shall review the ministry financial plan proposed by the president, seeing to it that the expenditures do not exceed anticipated support and resources, that the plan reflects the overall purposes and goals of the synod, and that the use of reserves is fiscally responsible.

~~(d) Requested items not included in the recommended ministry financial plan shall be placed on an unfunded list in priority order.~~

(e) ~~(d)~~ The synod in convention shall review ministry financial plan proposed by the Synodical Council, and, after making any desired changes, approve a complete ministry financial plan including the areas of ministry, ministerial education schools, and Support Services subsidiaries that is fiscally responsible.

(f) ~~(e)~~ At any time during the biennium, if the ministry financial plan approved by the synod in convention would result in expenditures greater than anticipated resources, or if the plan were to become fiscally imprudent, the Synodical Council shall adjust the plan in order that expenditures do not exceed anticipated resources or result in the fiscally imprudent use of those resources.

~~(g) Synod support allocations reduced by the process of adjustment, either by the synod in convention or by the Synodical Council, shall be placed on the unfunded priority list. The priorities on this list shall be determined by the Synodical Council on an ongoing basis upon recommendation of the respective area of ministry. Expenditures specifically approved by the synod in convention but eliminated because of lack of funds shall be given a high priority.~~

~~(h) (f)~~ At any time during the biennium, an area of ministry, synodical school, or Support Services subsidiary may request the Synodical Council to consider a request to modify the approved plan. The request shall be submitted and considered in accordance with procedures established by the Synodical Council.

# Financials

The financial information listed on the following pages summarizes the ministry financial plan (budget) approved for the 2021–23 biennium by the 2021 convention delegates, outlined on p. 30 in Resolution No. 1 from Committee #7: Ministry financial plan (budget).

## **Proposed ministry financial plan for 2021–23 biennium (FY22/FY23 Biennium)**

Planning for the FY22/FY23 Biennium was initiated in February 2020 or about 16 months before the start of the biennium. With the Financial Stabilization Fund balance above \$14 million at that time and the hope that CMO would increase slightly each year, the Synodical Council approved initial planning assumptions that would increase support levels by 3.0 percent annually to cover inflationary cost increases. The Synodical Council asked the WELS president to work with the areas of ministry to draft an initial ministry financial plan using this level of synod support for its review at their fall 2020 meeting. With this general direction by the Synodical Council, the areas of ministry, schools, and Support Services subsidiaries, working with their boards and commissions, proceeded to develop their ministry plans.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 health crisis escalated to a pandemic, causing unpredictable financial impacts for WELS and its affiliated ministries. To provide the WELS president and chief financial officer with enough information to determine the proper course of action to take for planning for the FY22/FY23 Biennium, the areas of ministry, schools, and Support Services subsidiaries were asked to provide three different scenarios of their planning schedules. Scenario 1 was to show their FY22/FY23 Biennium plan with flat synod support and flat wages. Scenario 2 was to show their FY22/FY23 Biennium plan with a 3.0 percent increase in synod support and a 2.5 percent wage increase. Scenario 3 was to show their FY22/FY23 Biennium plan with a 5.0 percent decrease in synod support and flat wages.

In late summer/early fall 2020, initial planning meetings were held with the areas of ministry, schools, and Support Services subsidiaries to walk through their plans. Once the WELS president and chief financial officer could see the possible impacts each scenario would have on the ministry financial plan and had a better understanding of some of the short-range and mid-range implications the COVID-19 pandemic was having on WELS ministries, a decision was made to go with a proposed plan of 2.0 percent annual increases in synod support, including a 2.0 percent increase in wages. This decision was made given the compounding impact a 3.0 percent increase in synod support was estimated to have on the Financial Stabilization Fund in the outyears of the biennium. After review of the proposed plan at its fall meeting, the Synodical Council approved the FY22/FY23 Biennium plan as presented.

In February 2021, the WELS president submitted a slightly modified ministry financial plan to the Synodical Council, updated for the carryforward impact of operational savings forecasted in FY21 and slightly modified CMO projections for FY22 and FY23 based on 2021 subscriptions and projected annual increases of 0.2 percent.

CMO has historically been flat to slightly declining since 2008. However, even during a global pandemic, calendar year 2020 CMO came in at its highest historical level of \$21.7 million. Further, calendar year 2021 CMO subscriptions have come in at \$21.6 million, just 0.6 percent lower than calendar year 2020 and the highest level of subscriptions on record. In the ministry financial plan provided to the Synodical Council in November 2020, a 0.5 percent increase in CMO was assumed, but that was based on a lower level of base CMO. Looking ahead to calendar years 2022 and 2023, it is difficult to determine if this level of CMO for calendar year 2021 is a new baseline or if we are sitting on any sort of bubble given the various economic relief programs that have been put in place to help both individuals and organizations over the past year.

To assess this potential level of CMO, several key economic indicators since the great recession of 2008–09 were compared to CMO trends over the same time. This included a general economic indicator in the Dow Jones Industrial

Average, an indicator of output in Real Gross Domestic Product, an employment indicator in the Unemployment Rate, and inflationary indicators including the Consumer Price Index and the Producer Price Index. The key takeaway of this analysis was that calendar year 2008 CMO levels of \$21.6 million were at an all-time historic high point during a time period of economic hardship, and then over the next few years as these major economic indicators recovered, CMO declined over \$1.0 million (or 5 percent) to \$20.5 million in calendar year 2011. This analysis along with the most recent five-year average CMO trend of a 0.2 percent annual increase led to utilizing a 0.2 percent increase in estimated CMO levels for the FY22/FY23 Biennium from the 0.5 percent increase presented in November 2020. Overall, CMO levels projected for the FY22/FY23 Biennium are higher than what was presented with the November plan based on higher calendar year 2020 receipts.

The proposed ministry financial plan for FY22 includes synod support of \$30.8 million, other expenses in areas of ministry and at the schools of \$53.7 million, and \$14.7 million of expense at the subsidiaries for a total ministry financial plan of \$99.2 million. The FY23 proposed plan includes synod support of \$31.3 million, other expenses in areas of ministry and at the schools of \$49.4 million, and \$14.9 million of expense at the subsidiaries for a total ministry financial plan of \$95.7 million. The proposed financial plan relies heavily on the drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund—approximately \$4.4 million over the FY22/FY23 Biennium—and on areas of ministry and schools using \$10.4 million of reserves in addition to other funding sources or one-time funds to sustain ongoing ministry. The planned drawdown of reserves in the Financial Stabilization Fund, areas of ministry special funds, and at the schools are not sustainable in the long term.

#### *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary*

The financial position of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary will remain strong with a combined projected deficit, or use of reserves, of \$35,000 planned over the biennium. The use of reserves is planned to fund the construction of a new faculty home on campus. Enrollment is projected to increase over the biennium by 11 students.

#### *Martin Luther College*

Martin Luther College continues to remain in a strong financial position with reserves projected to remain flat to FY20 levels. Synod support is planned to increase at MLC, and enrollments are projected to increase by five students over the two years.

#### *Luther Preparatory School*

While in a stable financial position, Luther Preparatory School is projecting a combined deficit of \$360,000 over the biennium, due mainly to planned capital projects. The use of reserves is anticipated due to the planned replacement of dorm windows and the replacement of a bus. Enrollment is projected to decrease by five students over the biennium.

#### *Michigan Lutheran Seminary*

Michigan Lutheran Seminary plans to improve its financial situation over the upcoming biennium. Reserves without donor restrictions are planned to increase a combined \$200,000 over the next two years. Enrollment is planned to increase by 16 students over the biennium, with the corresponding increases in tuition planned to offset inflationary cost increases.

#### *WELS Church Extension Fund and WELS Foundation*

The plans for WELS Church Extension Fund and WELS Foundation continue the trends of the last several years with no significant variations. Both entities are projecting surpluses that will allow them to continue serving the needs of their constituents and making the grants they have historically been able to make to WELS. The planned grants to Home Missions from CEF are expected to be \$1.1 million annually, and the planned grants to WELS for general operations from WELS Foundation are expected to be \$400,000 annually.

#### *WELS Investment Funds*

WELS Investment Funds is projecting stable results based on steady market conditions and a low administrative fee. The administrative fee may fluctuate from plan levels based on actual market conditions and the size of the WIF portfolio.

#### *Northwestern Publishing House*

Northwestern Publishing House is continuing to improve its financial strength. It is projecting a sizeable surplus from core operations for each year of the biennium due to improved top-line revenue and continued strong management of operating costs. A key driver to the top-line revenue improvement is the anticipated adoption of the new hymnal, which is being released in fall 2021, over a multi-year time horizon.

Please refer to the area of ministry reports contained elsewhere in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* for more details of the ministry financial plans for each area. Following is a summary of the support forecast and the proposed financial plan for each year of the biennium along with comparative information for the current biennium.

## Support forecast

The support forecast for the FY22/FY23 Biennium is based on trends and assumptions related to CMO and the Financial Stabilization Fund, including assumed levels of grants, gifts, unrestricted bequests, investment income, endowment distributions, and other income sources. Calendar year 2021 subscriptions serve as the base for CMO in the FY22/FY23 Biennium. CMO subscriptions for 2021 are \$21.6 million, down only 0.6 percent compared to actual 2020 CMO receipts but 3.5 percent higher than 2020 CMO subscriptions. Given the continued economic uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, CMO is planned to increase 0.2 percent for calendar years 2022 and 2023.

The Financial Stabilization Fund holds all non-CMO operating support for the year(s) after receipt and includes the following support categories:

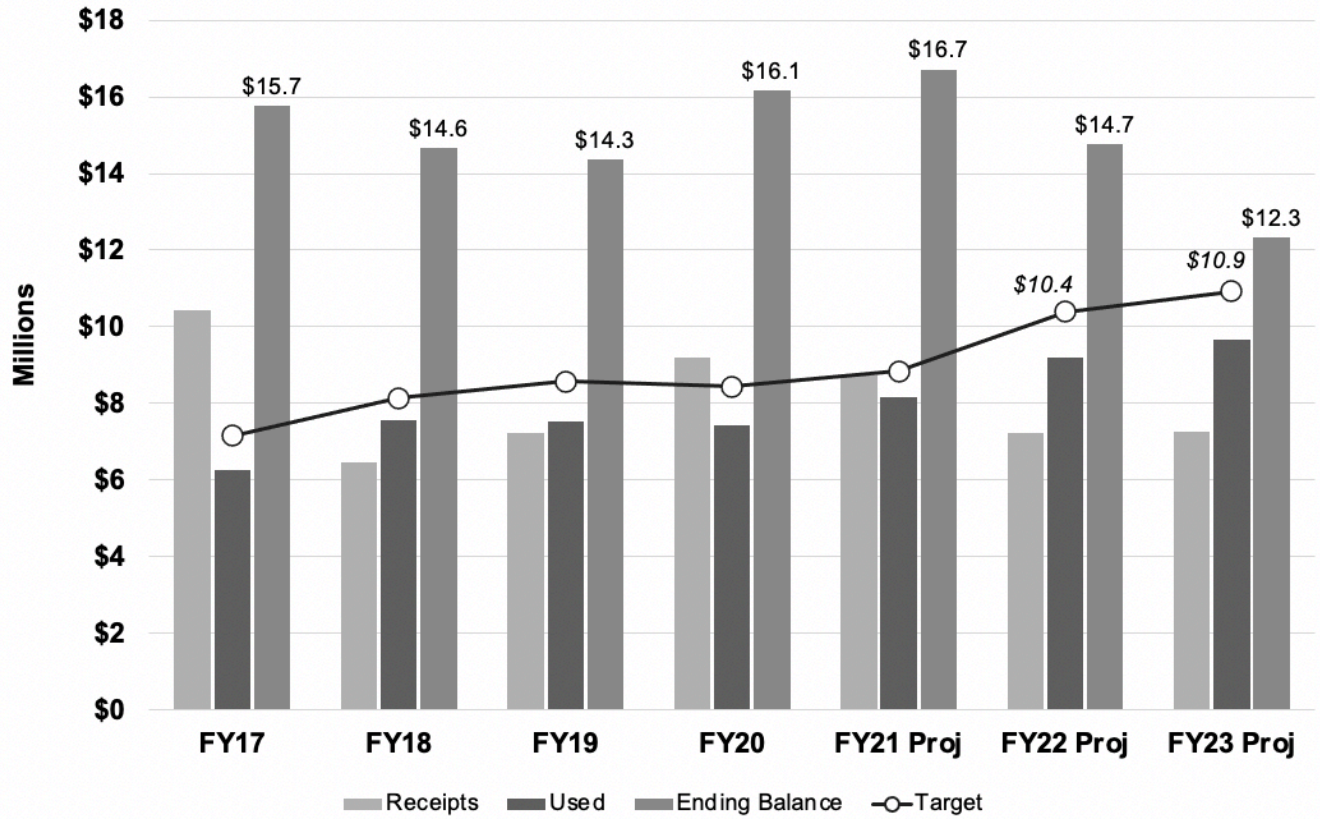
- **Grants** (\$2.7 million in both FY22 and FY23)—The majority of the grants come from the Schwan Foundation and are projected to be approximately \$1.8 million per year for FY22 and FY23. WELS Foundation's unrestricted net asset policy facilitates the transfer of undesignated net assets to support WELS general ministries with projected grants of approximately \$400,000 per year for FY22 and FY23. Other grants include distributions of approximately \$400,000 per year from a gifted interest in a Limited Liability Company (LLC) that was terminated near the end of FY17 and anticipated excess reserves transferred from the insurance reserve.
- **Gifts from individuals** (\$1.2 million in both FY22 and FY23)—The vast majority of these unrestricted gifts come from individuals and congregations and are projected to be approximately \$1.0 million per year for FY22 and FY23. This continues the trend of relatively flat gift levels over the last few years with the assumption that donors will continue to prefer to direct their gifts to specific ministries. In addition, gifts are forecasted from various special appeals for WELS Mission & Ministry and the discontinued programs of Walking Together and Mission Partners. Gifts to these programs are projected to be approximately \$188,000 per year for FY22 and FY23.
- **Unrestricted bequests** (\$1.6 million in both FY22 and FY23)—Unrestricted bequests represent estate gifts to WELS without donor restrictions and are projected to be approximately \$1.6 million per year for FY22 and FY23. These estimates are based on recent trends. However, due to the unpredictable timing of the distribution of an estate gift, they are difficult to project. In addition, recent trends have shown that donors are becoming better informed of the opportunities to restrict their estate gifts to specific ministries, which could add to the unpredictability of these unrestricted bequests.
- **Investment income** (\$1.3 million in both FY22 and FY23)—Investment income represents returns on non-endowed funds, the continued investment returns from existing annuity contracts, and an anticipated decrease in investable reserves. Current annuity contracts will terminate upon the death of each annuitant. In FY20, several contracts held by CEF and WELS Foundation were consolidated under WELS, which provided cash to those entities to reinvest in operations. Given current annuity contract returns of between 3.0 percent and 4.0 percent and investments in other banking instruments at lower interest rate levels, investment income is projected to be approximately \$1.3 million per year for FY22 and FY23.
- **Endowment distributions and other** (\$371,000 in FY22 and \$387,000 in FY23)—Includes distributions from WELS operating endowment funds and other miscellaneous income sources, including but not limited to subsidiary rental payments as defined by the Synodical Council's Building Fund policy; the synod's workers compensation dividend program, which fluctuates based on WELS' overall annual loss ratio; and proceeds from the corporate credit card rebate program. Slight increases during the biennium were assumed.

The cumulative total of these sources of support into the Financial Stabilization Fund are projected to be approximately \$7.2 million per year for FY22 and FY23. With planned synod support of \$30.8 million in FY22, transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund are planned to be approximately \$9.2 million, resulting in a forecasted decrease in the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$2.0 million to end FY22 with a Financial Stabilization Fund balance of approximately \$14.7 million. In FY23, synod support levels are forecasted to reach approximately \$31.3 million with CMO projections of \$21.7 million, leading to an increased level of transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund at \$9.6 million. This results in a forecasted decrease in the Financial Stabilization Fund of approximately \$2.4 million to end FY23 with a Financial Stabilization Fund balance of approximately \$12.3 million, just slightly above the target balance as noted in the Synodical Council's Financial Stabilization Fund policy.

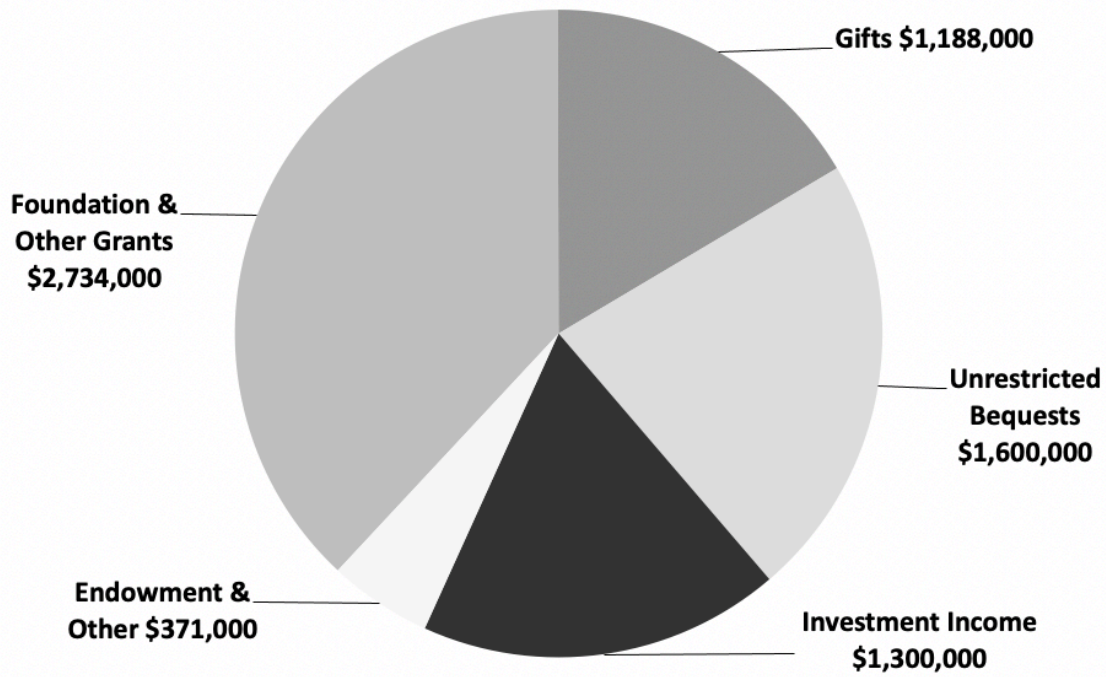
Two primary factors (other than the noted levels of non-CMO operating support above) that could impact the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund in the upcoming biennium include how each area of ministry performs as compared to their operating budgets (synod support levels) as well as the level of CMO received as compared to subscription levels. If savings are seen within area of ministry operating budgets and/or congregations can exceed the 0.2 percent increase in CMO, less will need to be transferred from the Financial Stabilization Fund to cover WELS' operating expenses. However, if CMO receipts fall short of the 0.2 percent increase, additional transfers out of the Financial Stabilization Fund may be needed (which would draw the balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund lower) or spending reductions may be deemed necessary.



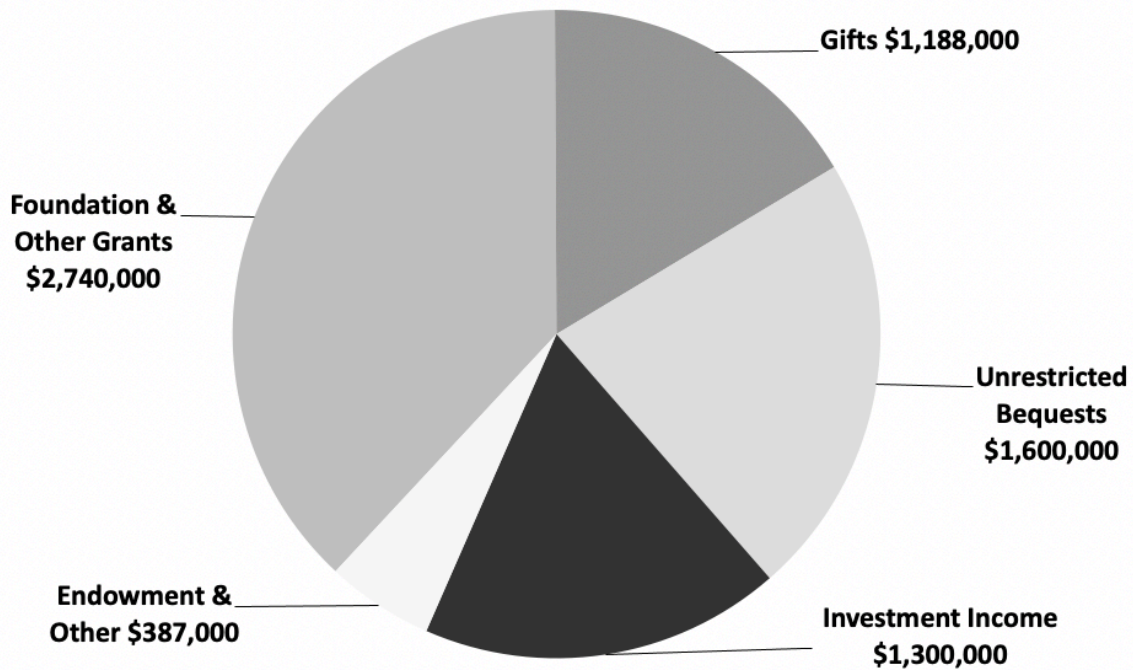
# Financial Stabilization Fund



**FY 2021-22 Support  
Financial Stabilization Fund  
\$7,193,000**



**FY 2022-23 Support  
Financial Stabilization Fund  
\$7,215,000**



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

	FY20 Actual			FY21 Plan			FY22 Plan			FY23 Plan						
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE
<b>SUMMARY</b>																
Home Missions	5,506,000	3,942,835	9,448,835	11.25	5,680,500	4,522,500	10,203,000	12.75	5,794,000	5,018,000	10,812,000	13.25	5,910,000	4,960,000	10,870,000	13.25
World Missions	6,602,000	3,088,809	9,690,809	52.50	6,826,000	3,933,800	10,759,800	55.70	6,962,000	4,975,000	11,937,000	57.75	7,101,000	4,927,000	12,028,000	57.25
Ministerial Education	8,231,957	30,944,366	39,176,323	326.35	8,051,200	37,089,400	45,140,600	333.00	8,280,000	38,375,000	46,656,000	332.73	8,447,000	35,787,000	44,234,000	333.73
Congregation & District Ministry	5,450,170	1,995,548	7,445,718	41.35	6,187,800	2,264,800	8,452,600	43.70	6,411,000	3,246,000	9,657,000	44.80	6,451,000	1,711,000	8,162,000	44.80
Ministry Support	3,016,920	1,843,950	4,860,870	25.80	3,399,300	2,472,800	5,872,100	26.00	3,343,000	2,055,000	5,398,000	26.80	3,411,000	2,050,000	5,461,000	26.80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28,807,047</b>	<b>41,815,508</b>	<b>70,622,555</b>	<b>457.25</b>	<b>30,144,800</b>	<b>50,283,300</b>	<b>80,428,100</b>	<b>471.15</b>	<b>30,790,000</b>	<b>53,670,000</b>	<b>84,460,000</b>	<b>475.33</b>	<b>31,320,000</b>	<b>49,435,000</b>	<b>80,755,000</b>	<b>475.83</b>

	FY20	% of total	FY21	% of total	% change	FY22	% of total	% change	FY23	% of total	% change
<b>Synod Support</b>											
Home Missions	5,506,000	19.1%	5,680,500	18.8%	3.2%	5,794,000	18.8%	2.0%	5,910,000	18.9%	2.0%
World Missions	6,602,000	22.9%	6,826,000	22.6%	3.4%	6,962,000	22.6%	2.0%	7,101,000	22.7%	2.0%
Ministerial Education	8,231,957	28.6%	8,051,200	26.7%	-2.2%	8,280,000	26.9%	2.8%	8,447,000	27.0%	2.0%
Congregation & District Ministry	5,450,170	18.9%	6,187,800	20.5%	13.5%	6,411,000	20.8%	3.6%	6,451,000	20.6%	0.6%
Ministry Support	3,016,920	10.5%	3,399,300	11.3%	12.7%	3,343,000	10.9%	-1.7%	3,411,000	10.9%	2.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28,807,047</b>		<b>30,144,800</b>		<b>4.6%</b>	<b>30,790,000</b>		<b>2.1%</b>	<b>31,320,000</b>		<b>1.7%</b>

	FY20	% of total	FY21	% of total	% change	FY22	% of total	% change	FY23	% of total	% change
<b>Total Expenses</b>											
Home Missions	9,448,835	13.4%	10,203,000	12.7%	8.0%	10,812,000	12.8%	6.0%	10,870,000	13.5%	0.5%
World Missions	9,690,809	13.7%	10,759,800	13.4%	11.0%	11,937,000	14.1%	10.9%	12,028,000	14.9%	0.8%
Ministerial Education	39,176,323	55.5%	45,140,600	56.1%	15.2%	46,656,000	55.2%	3.4%	44,234,000	54.8%	-5.2%
Congregation & District Ministry	7,445,718	10.5%	8,452,600	10.5%	13.5%	9,657,000	11.4%	14.2%	8,162,000	10.1%	-15.5%
Ministry Support	4,860,870	6.9%	5,872,100	7.3%	20.8%	5,398,000	6.4%	-8.1%	5,461,000	6.8%	1.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70,622,555</b>		<b>80,428,100</b>		<b>13.9%</b>	<b>84,460,000</b>		<b>5.0%</b>	<b>80,755,000</b>		<b>-4.4%</b>

	FY20 Actual			FY21 Plan			FY22 Plan			FY23 Plan						
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE
<b>Support Services Subsidiaries</b>																
WELS Church Extension Fund	-	8,277,961	8,277,961	6.85	-	6,518,000	6,518,000	6.80	-	7,869,000	7,869,000	6.85	-	8,147,000	8,147,000	6.85
WELS Foundation	-	1,046,028	1,046,028	3.50	-	1,002,300	1,002,300	3.45	-	1,028,000	1,028,000	3.20	-	1,033,000	1,033,000	3.20
WELS Investment Funds	-	412,088	412,088	1.75	-	414,400	414,400	1.55	-	437,000	437,000	2.00	-	472,000	472,000	2.00
Northwestern Publishing House	-	4,424,940	4,424,940	29.00	-	4,342,200	4,342,200	27.00	-	5,402,000	5,402,000	30.00	-	5,271,000	5,271,000	24.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>14,161,017</b>	<b>14,161,017</b>	<b>41.10</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>12,276,900</b>	<b>12,276,900</b>	<b>38.80</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>14,736,000</b>	<b>14,736,000</b>	<b>42.05</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>14,923,000</b>	<b>14,923,000</b>	<b>36.05</b>

<b>TOTAL WELS &amp; SUBSIDIARIES</b>	<b>28,807,047</b>	<b>55,976,525</b>	<b>84,783,572</b>	<b>498.35</b>	<b>30,144,800</b>	<b>62,560,200</b>	<b>92,705,000</b>	<b>509.95</b>	<b>30,790,000</b>	<b>68,406,000</b>	<b>99,196,000</b>	<b>517.38</b>	<b>31,320,000</b>	<b>64,358,000</b>	<b>95,678,000</b>	<b>511.88</b>
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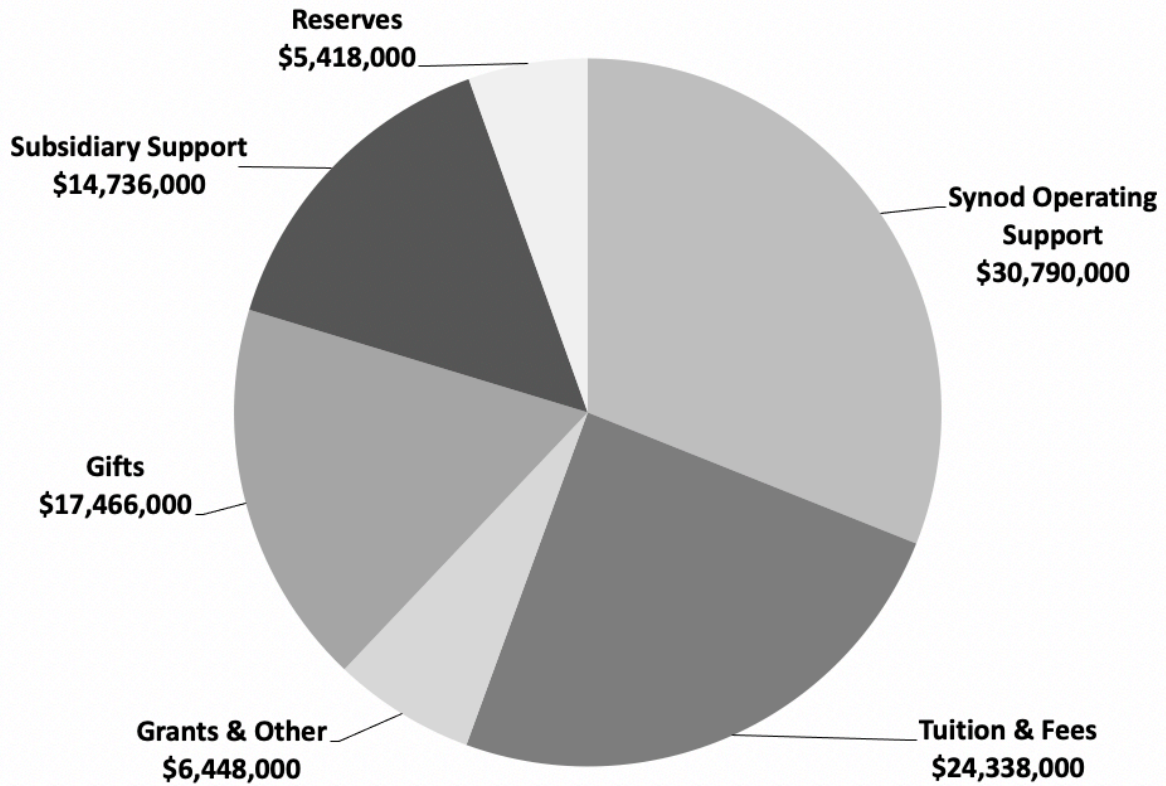
Plan Summary of Expenses												
Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees												
	FY20 Actual			FY21 Plan			FY22 Plan			FY23 Plan		
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE
<b>Home Missions</b>												
Board and Administration	592,549	7,459	600,008	4.25	703,075	95,900	798,975	5.25	712,000	23,000	735,000	4.75
Multi-cultural Ministry	1,371,935	916,124	2,288,059	1.00	1,344,005	938,300	2,282,305	1.00	1,284,000	805,000	2,089,000	1.00
Campus Ministry	347,677	10,000	357,677	0.50	417,185	114,000	531,185	1.00	414,000	101,000	515,000	1.00
Outreach Ministry	3,193,839	2,555,746	5,749,585	3.00	3,216,235	2,366,100	5,582,335	3.00	3,384,000	2,981,000	6,365,000	3.00
Joint Mission Council Ministry	-	453,506	453,506	2.50	-	1,008,200	1,008,200	2.50	-	1,108,000	1,108,000	3.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,506,000</b>	<b>3,942,835</b>	<b>9,448,835</b>	<b>11.25</b>	<b>5,680,500</b>	<b>4,522,500</b>	<b>10,203,000</b>	<b>12.75</b>	<b>5,794,000</b>	<b>5,018,000</b>	<b>10,812,000</b>	<b>13.25</b>

<b>World Missions</b>												
Board and Administration	491,058	308,520	799,578	4.25	370,400	293,700	664,100	5.25	324,000	452,000	776,000	5.75
Africa	1,157,459	525,639	1,683,098	11.20	1,487,800	795,600	2,283,400	12.20	1,431,000	619,000	2,050,000	11.20
Europe	555,248	121,106	676,354	1.00	580,800	103,000	683,800	1.00	590,000	245,500	835,500	1.00
Latin America	757,432	162,033	919,465	6.00	786,000	147,500	933,500	6.50	836,000	178,200	1,014,200	6.00
Native America	381,861	98,936	480,797	3.50	426,000	174,500	600,500	3.50	406,000	179,800	585,800	3.50
East Asia	1,409,447	169,080	1,578,527	8.75	1,374,200	142,500	1,516,700	10.00	1,329,000	118,000	1,447,000	8.50
Asia	1,108,176	245,492	1,353,668	6.50	1,231,300	511,000	1,742,300	7.75	1,238,000	1,027,000	2,265,000	9.50
New Initiatives	-	-	-	0.00	-	250,000	250,000	0.00	-	570,000	570,000	0.00
Multi-Language Publications	576,332	727,289	1,303,621	8.00	409,600	928,000	1,337,600	6.50	633,000	949,000	1,582,000	9.00
Joint Mission Council	-	527,451	527,451	3.30	-	538,000	538,000	3.00	-	531,500	531,500	3.30
Other	164,987	203,263	368,250	0.00	159,900	50,000	209,900	0.00	175,000	105,000	280,000	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,602,000</b>	<b>3,088,809</b>	<b>9,690,809</b>	<b>52.50</b>	<b>6,826,000</b>	<b>3,933,800</b>	<b>10,759,800</b>	<b>55.70</b>	<b>6,962,000</b>	<b>4,975,000</b>	<b>11,937,000</b>	<b>57.75</b>

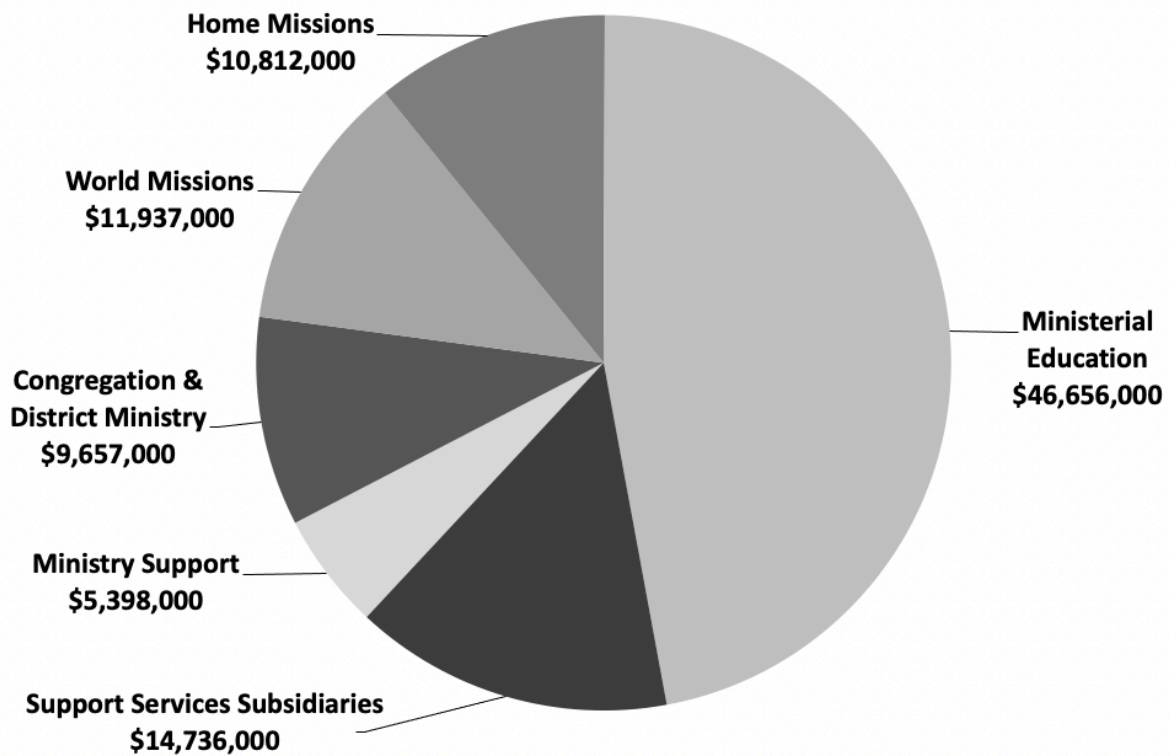
<b>Ministerial Education</b>												
Board and Administration	145,099	1,075,243	1,220,342	1.00	138,700	920,000	1,058,700	1.00	208,000	1,125,000	1,333,000	1.00
Retiree Health Care	70,858	-	70,858	0.00	33,000	-	33,000	0.00	34,000	-	34,000	0.00
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary	983,000	5,214,149	6,197,149	36.20	983,000	5,067,000	6,050,000	37.60	867,000	6,114,000	6,981,000	36.50
Martin Luther College	3,469,000	16,909,412	20,378,412	185.25	3,469,000	21,838,000	25,307,000	191.40	3,672,000	22,338,000	26,010,000	190.73
Luther Preparatory School	2,422,000	5,041,494	7,463,494	64.40	2,422,000	5,961,000	8,383,000	64.00	2,371,000	6,041,000	8,412,000	65.00
Michigan Lutheran Seminary	1,142,000	2,704,068	3,846,068	39.50	1,005,500	3,303,400	4,308,900	39.00	1,128,000	2,758,000	3,886,000	39.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,231,957</b>	<b>30,944,366</b>	<b>39,176,323</b>	<b>326.35</b>	<b>8,051,200</b>	<b>37,089,400</b>	<b>45,140,600</b>	<b>333.00</b>	<b>8,280,000</b>	<b>38,376,000</b>	<b>46,656,000</b>	<b>332.73</b>

Plan Summary of Expenses												
Funded by Synod Support and Special Funds, Gifts, Tuition and Fees												
	FY20 Actual			FY21 Plan			FY22 Plan			FY23 Plan		
	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE	Synod Support	Special, gifts, tuition, fees	Total Expense	FTE
<b>Congregation &amp; District Ministry</b>												
Congregation Services	1,355,700	1,389,512	2,745,212	17.75	1,454,600	2,070,800	3,525,400	18.00	1,482,000	2,975,000	4,457,000	18.50
Conference of Presidents	59,557	206,672	266,229		171,600	10,000	181,600		186,000	50,000	236,000	
Christian Giving	2,040,025	17,441	2,057,466	17.60	2,338,000	-	2,338,000	19.20	2,388,000	-	2,388,000	19.80
Communication Services	564,405	76,662	641,067	6.00	593,000	87,000	680,000	6.50	605,000	89,000	694,000	6.50
District Ministries	1,080,710	-	1,080,710	0.00	1,191,400	-	1,191,400	0.00	1,224,000	-	1,224,000	0.00
Convention	70,815	101,250	172,065	0.00	-	-	-	0.00	96,000	-	96,000	0.00
CICR	9,418	204,011	213,429	0.00	44,200	97,000	141,200	0.00	40,000	132,000	172,000	0.00
Special Support	63,190	-	63,190	0.00	85,000	-	85,000	0.00	90,000	-	90,000	0.00
Support	206,350	-	206,350	0.00	310,000	-	310,000	0.00	300,000	-	300,000	0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,450,170</b>	<b>1,995,548</b>	<b>7,445,718</b>	<b>41.35</b>	<b>6,187,800</b>	<b>2,264,800</b>	<b>8,452,600</b>	<b>43.70</b>	<b>6,411,000</b>	<b>3,246,000</b>	<b>9,657,000</b>	<b>44.80</b>
<b>Ministry Support</b>												
Facilities	192,051	156,022	348,073	0.00	239,000	350,000	589,000	0.00	243,000	207,000	450,000	0.00
Synodical Council	70,895	469,355	540,250	0.00	90,300	520,000	610,300	0.00	92,000	520,000	612,000	0.00
Synod Presidium	283,967	-	283,967	2.00	341,500	-	341,500	2.00	343,000	-	343,000	2.00
Special Task Forces	352	-	352	0.00	1,300	-	1,300	0.00	2,000	-	2,000	0.00
Archives	87,433	-	87,433	1.00	100,300	-	100,300	1.00	105,000	-	105,000	1.00
Technology	1,242,668	33,355	1,276,023	13.00	1,449,100	77,400	1,526,500	13.00	1,393,000	78,000	1,471,000	13.00
Financial Services	890,609	-	890,609	7.00	908,300	-	908,300	7.00	890,000	-	890,000	7.00
Human Resources	248,945	155	249,100	2.00	269,500	400	269,900	2.00	275,000	-	275,000	2.00
CAR	-	1,185,063	1,185,063	0.80	-	1,525,000	1,525,000	1.00	-	1,250,000	1,250,000	1.80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,016,920</b>	<b>1,843,950</b>	<b>4,860,870</b>	<b>25.80</b>	<b>3,399,300</b>	<b>2,472,800</b>	<b>5,872,100</b>	<b>26.00</b>	<b>3,343,000</b>	<b>2,055,000</b>	<b>5,398,000</b>	<b>26.80</b>

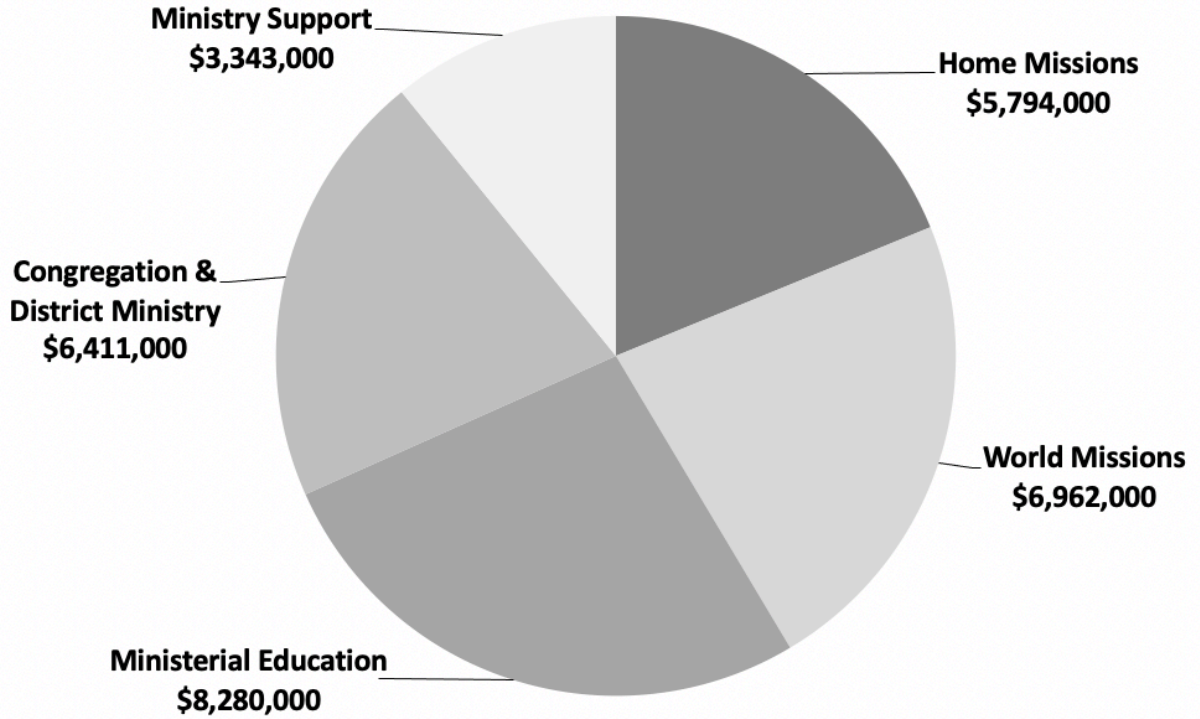
**FY 2021-22 Total Ministry Plan Support  
\$99,196,000**



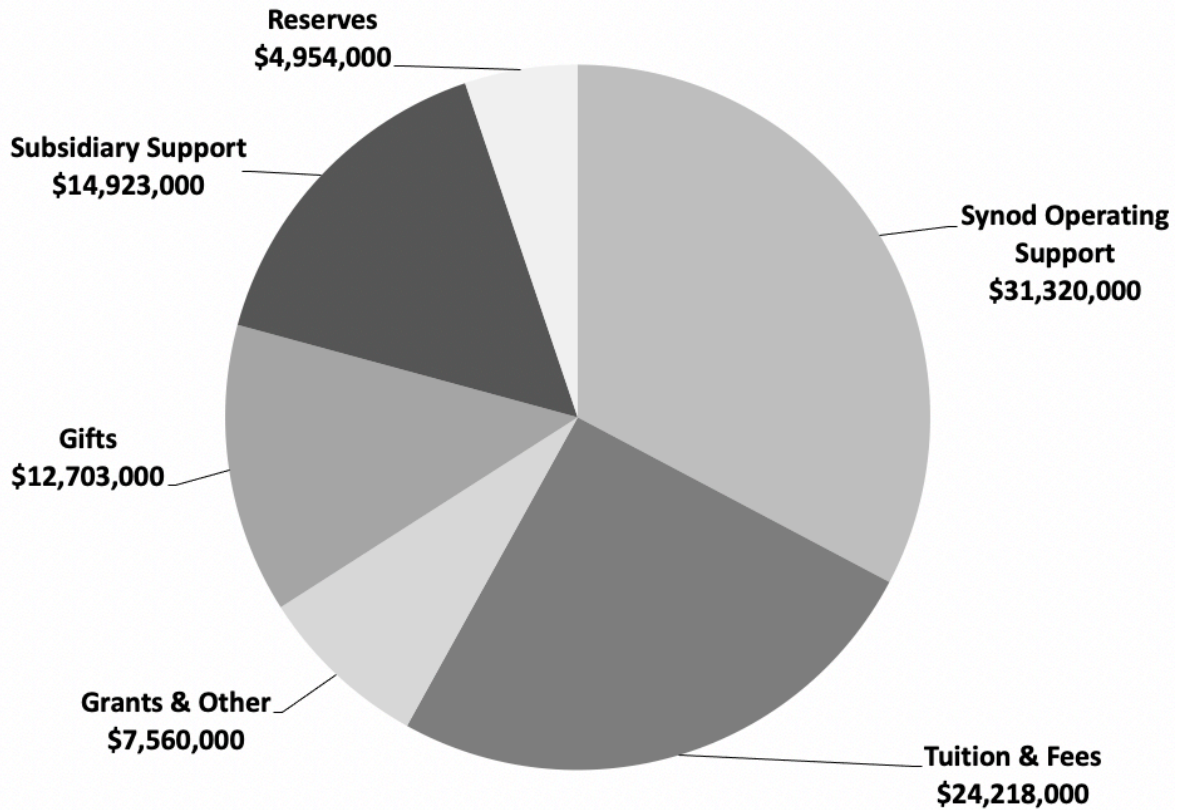
**FY 2021-22 Total Ministry Plan Expenses  
\$99,196,000**



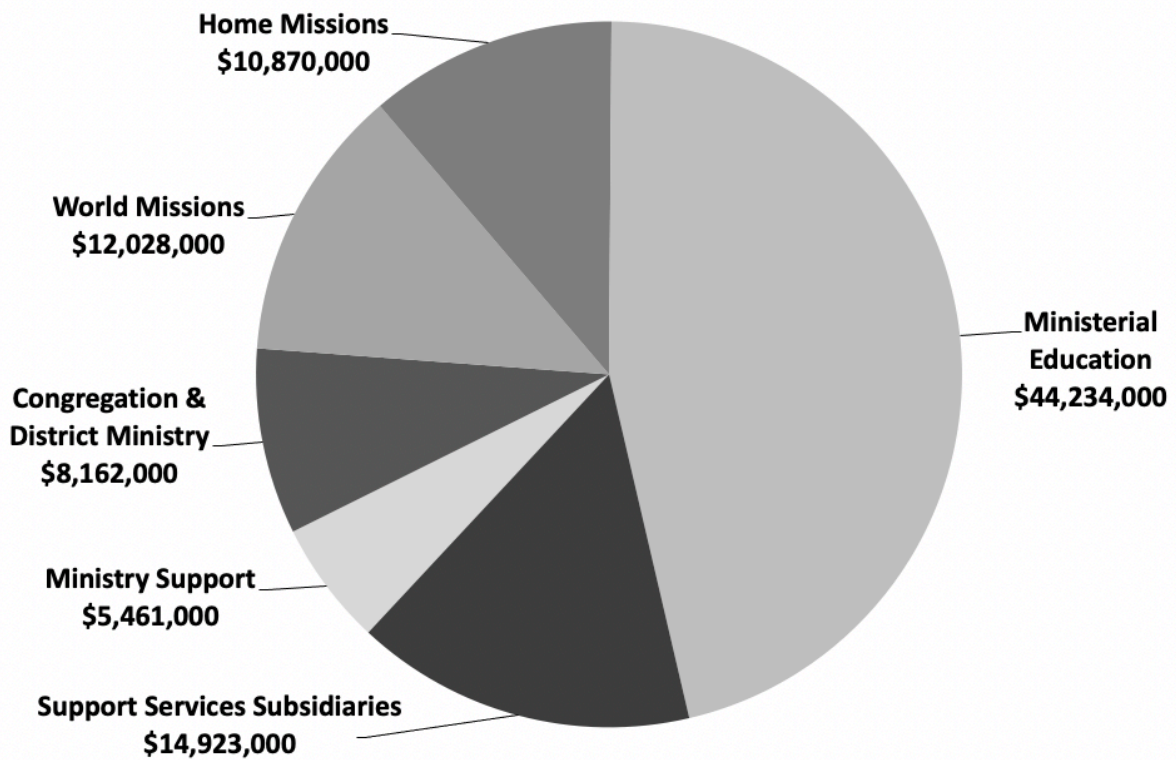
## FY 2021-22 Synod Operating Support Allocation \$30,790,000



**FY 2022-23 Total Ministry Plan Support  
\$95,678,000**

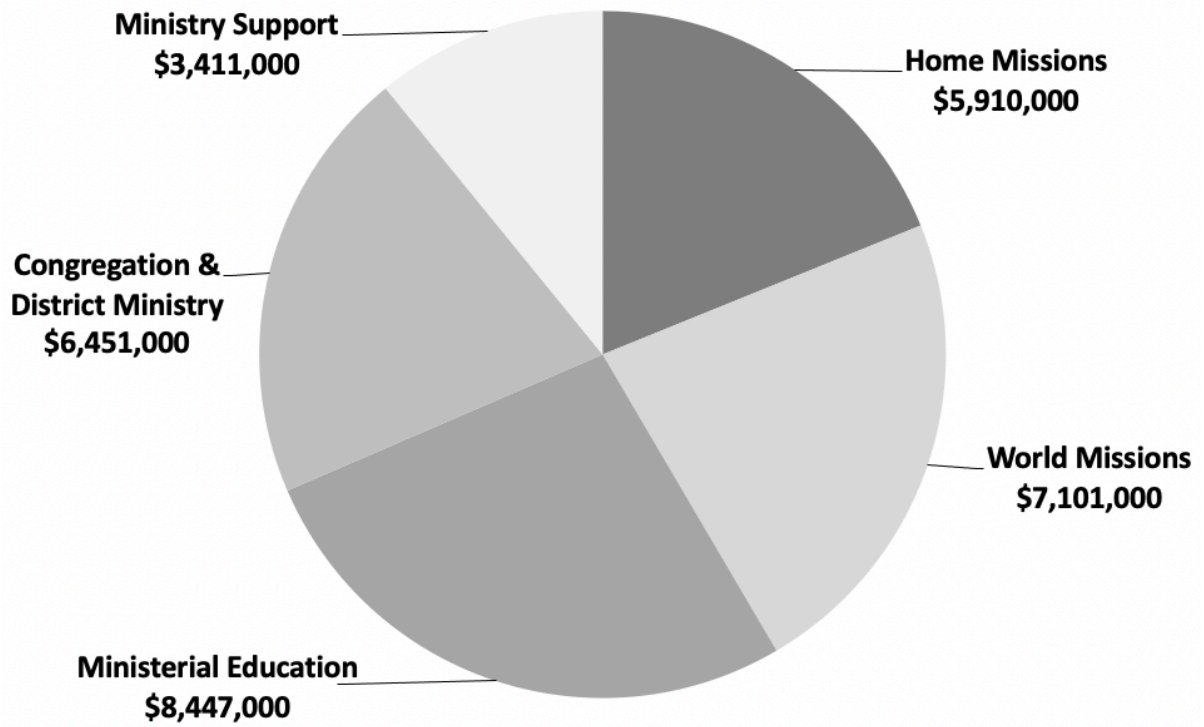


**FY 2022-23 Total Ministry Plan Expenses  
\$95,678,000**





## FY 2022-23 Synod Operating Support Allocation \$31,320,000





# Minutes

## **Monday, July 26, 2021**

In preparation for the 66th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, a delegate orientation was held at 4:00 p.m. both in person and via Zoom for virtual delegates. Rev. Joel Voss, WELS second vice president; Mr. Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer; and Mr. Lee Hitter, WELS communications director, offered instructions for delegates.

The opening service with communion took place in the LPS chapel. The presiding minister was Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president, and the preacher was Rev. Joel Voss, WELS second vice president. Organist was Teacher Randy Bode and the cantor was Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president. The sermon was based on Colossians 3:15-17, "By God's grace here we still stand." Instrumentalists included Ryan Stangl, Josiah Loersch, Josiah Winkel, Linda Moeller and Marcus Winkel.

Fellowship followed the service.

## **Tuesday, July 27, 2021**

The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society offered a recorded presentation of flags of countries in which WELS is actively participating in the sharing of the gospel. The LWMS was thanked for its partnership and its presentation.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president, called the 66th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to order at 8:19 a.m. Rev. Mark Luetzow, Michigan Lutheran Seminary president, led the opening devotion, which was based on 1 Peter 3:15,16, "Here we stand with humility." The hymn, "If God Himself Be For Me," was sung. Luetzow was thanked for his devotion.

President Schroeder introduced Rev. Matthew Crass, Luther Preparatory School president, who welcomed all in attendance. He shared a history of the Watertown campus and emphasized that the school continues to share the Word of God in its truth and purity.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president, welcomed special guests attending the convention: Rev. Glenn Obenberger, president, Evangelical Lutheran Synod; Rev. Paul Tiefel, Church of the Lutheran Confession; Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, president, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod; Rev. Dr. Jonathan Shaw, director of church relations, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod; and Rev. Dr. John Wohlrabe, second vice president, Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. The guests were welcomed with a round of applause.

Rev. Jon Buchholz, chairman of the Steering Committee, presented the report of elections, all of which had taken place prior to the convention.

First Vice President James Huebner took the chair. President Mark Schroeder presented the President's Report. Rev. Michael Seifert, chairman of Floor Committee #1, President's Report, presented Report 01-01 and Report 01-02. Resolution 01-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. President Schroeder and Committee #1 were thanked. President Schroeder resumed the chair.

First Vice President James Huebner and Recording Secretary Robert Pasbrig accepted their re-elections and asked the almighty God to bless their work in his name.

Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS chief financial officer, presented the ministry financial plan for 2021–23. Rev. Daniel Balge, chairman, Floor Committee #7: Ministry Financial Plan, presented the committee's written report. Resolution 07-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously. Egan and the committee were thanked.

Rev. James Huebner presented a report for the Continuing Education for Called Workers Committee. He was thanked for his presentation.

At 9:54 a.m., a break was declared. The morning session resumed at 10:23 a.m.

Prof. James Danell, chairman, Commission on Inter-Church Relations, presented the committee's printed report. Rev. Kurt Schaser, chairman of Floor Committee #3: Commission on Inter-Church Relations, presented the committee's printed response. Danell, the commission, and the floor committee were thanked for their work.

Rev. Glenn Obenberger, Evangelical Lutheran Synod president, addressed the convention presenting fraternal greetings from the ELS. He mentioned the sudden passing of President Moldstad in January 2021. He commented on the convention theme and encouraged WELS to continue to take a stand on God's Word. A gift of a book printed on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was presented to President Schroeder. Obenberger was thanked for his presentation.

Rev. Matthew Harrison, president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), addressed the convention, the first time in many years that an LCMS president has been in attendance at a WELS convention. He expressed thanks for the ongoing discussions being held with WELS and thanked the synod for the discussions. President Schroeder was presented a gift. President Schroeder responded that he is looking forward to ongoing discussions with the LCMS. There was a round of applause.

Rev. Glenn Schwanke, chairman of Floor Committee #18: Constitutional Matters, presented the committee's resolutions:

Resolution 18-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 18-02 was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 18-03 was moved and supported. The motion carried by more than a two-thirds majority.

Resolution 18-04 was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 18-05 was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 18-06 was moved and supported. The motion carried by more than a two-thirds majority.

Resolution 18-07 was moved and supported. The motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 18-08 was moved and supported. The motion carried by more than a two-thirds majority. The committee was thanked for its work.

Rev. Nathan Sutton, chairman of Floor Committee #2: Conference of Presidents, presented Report 02-01 and Report 02-03. Memorial 2021-01 was read; the committee did not recommend acceptance of this memorial. Memorial 2021-02 was read. Resolution 02-03 was moved and supported. The motion carried.

Rev. Steven Hillmer, chairman of Floor Committee #6: Synodical Council, read Report 06-01, Report 06-02, and Report 06-03. The committee was thanked.

Suggestions for the designation of the opening service offering were requested.

Rev. Justin Cloute, chairman of Floor Committee #5: Communications, offered Report 05-01. The committee was thanked.

The morning session adjourned for lunch at 11:54 a.m. President Schroeder led the delegates in the common table prayer.

The afternoon session was called to order at 1:03 p.m. by President Schroeder.

Rev. John Braun spoke about the convention theme, "Here we stand." A video, "Here we stand," was viewed. A Bible study that goes with the video was described. The Bible study will be available in September.

Rev. Earle Treptow, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary president, presented the convention essay: "Here we stand: Imitating Luther's faith."

At 2:51 p.m., a break was declared. Ice cream and cake were served, a gift of Northwestern Publishing House. The afternoon session resumed at 3:19 p.m.

The essay was discussed. President Treptow was thanked, and a round of applause followed.

President Schroeder explained the reason for the bylaws' use of the new term, "ministry" certified rather than "synodically" certified.

A vote was taken to determine the recipient of the service offering: Vietnamese/Hmong outreach, Christian Aid and Relief, or "Equipping Christian Witnesses." Vietnamese/Hmong outreach received the most votes.

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator, and Rev. Duane Rodewald, chairman, of the Board for Ministerial Education, reported, emphasizing a task force studying, among other things, the instruction program for non-traditional students.

Rev. Richard Gurgel, Martin Luther College (MLC) president, brought greetings from MLC and presented the "Equipping Christian Witnesses" campaign. A video was shown. To date, about \$7,500,000 has been received toward this campaign. Rev. Steven Pagels, chairman of Floor Committee #10: Ministerial Education, presented Report 10-01. Resolution 10-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution 10-02 was moved and supported. The motion carried. The presenters and the committee were thanked for their work.

Mr. William Ziche, president of Northwestern Publishing House, presented his report. Rev. Steven Daley, chairman of Floor Committee #16: Northwestern Publishing House and Publication Coordinating Commission, reported for the floor committee. Report 16-01 and Report 16-02 were read. Resolution 16-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. The committee and the presenters were thanked.

Teacher Benjamin Schramm, chairman of Floor Committee #14: Support Services, shared the Report 14-01. Resolution 14-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. The committee was thanked.

At 5:04 p.m. the afternoon session adjourned. There was no evening session, but fellowship was celebrated with refreshments following the evening meal.

### **Wednesday, July 28, 2019**

President Schroeder called the morning session to order at 8:01 a.m. He announced changes in the morning agenda. The morning devotion was led by Rev. Matthew Crass, Luther Preparatory School president. The devotion, "Here We Stand: With Joy," was based on 1 John 1:5-8. The hymn, "With the Lord Begin Your Task," was sung. Crass was thanked for his devotion.

Rev. Daniel Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, shared a video update. He presented the commission's recent goals and work. Rev. Carlos Leyrer, chairman of Floor Committee #17: WELS Christian Aid and Relief, read Report 17-01. The men and committee were thanked.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator, and Rev. Paul Janke, chairman of World Missions, presented updates. A World Missions goal is to serve 500,000 souls led by well-trained pastors in the near future. Forty-four countries beyond the USA are now being served by over 400 pastors. In Vietnam, a goal is to train over 450 pastors; the first group are only a year away from graduating. Online outreach is bringing many new prospects in numerous South American countries. Numerous other information was also shared. Rev. Philip Huebner, chairman of Floor Committee #9: World Missions/Joint Mission Council, presented Report 09-01. The committee and the men were thanked.

Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of Benefit Plans, presented a PowerPoint presentation regarding the proposed new retirement savings plan and then answered questions from delegates about the plan. Rev. Caleb Davisson, secretary of Floor Committee #19: Benefit Plans and Pension Proposal, presented Resolution 19-01. The resolution was moved and supported. The motion carried. The committees and Benefit Plans and all others involved in preparing the recommendation were thanked.

A break in the morning session was declared at 9:57 a.m. The morning session resumed at 10:31 a.m.

Rev. Michael Schultz, director of the WELS Hymnal Project, spoke of the work on the hymnal project as it began in 2011 and continues to this year. A video was shown. Twelve committees and nearly 100 volunteers have been working on this project. Seventeen books with 3,500 printed pages of music and 3 digital projects with over 20,000 pages of music are under production. A gradual change to the new materials is strongly suggested. Numerous thanks were shared. President Schroeder was presented with the first early copy of the new hymnal produced to the glory

of God and the edification of his people. It was moved and supported to thank all involved with the project and to accept *Christian Worship* as the WELS hymnal. The motion carried. The assembly rose and joined in the singing of the common Doxology.

Rev. Keith Free, administrator, and Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman, Home Missions, presented information. With God's blessing, the "Every State by '78!" initiative helped WELS establish congregations in every U.S. state by 1983. Many blessings resulted. Now, an initiative to establish 100 new missions and 75 enhancements in the next 10 years was suggested. Several local initiatives to begin a new mission are currently taking place. The Church Extension Fund and the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society are wonderful partners to Home Missions. Campus ministry is expanding. Rev. Aaron Mueller, chairman, Floor Committee #8: Home Missions, read Report 08-01. Resolution 08-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. All involved in Home Missions were thanked. A motion off the floor, to thank Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn for his service on the Board for Home Missions and to wish God's blessings on the new Home Missions chairman, Rev. Mark Gabb, was moved and supported. The motion carried.

Rev. John Koelpin, chairman, Floor Committee #15: Subsidiaries, read Report 15-01, Report 15-02, and Report 15-03. The committee was thanked and dismissed.

Rev. Nathan Sutton, chairman of Floor Committee #2: Conference of Presidents, read Report 02-02. Resolution 02-04 was moved and supported. The motion carried. The opening service offering totals over \$2,000 with more gifts still being received. Resolution 02-01 was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution 02-02 was moved and supported. The motion carried. The committee was dismissed with thanks.

After announcements, the morning session closed with the common table prayer led by President Schroeder at 12:01 p.m.

President Schroeder called the afternoon session to order at 1:02 p.m.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, director, and Prof. David Scharf, chairman, of WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling, were introduced. A video was shown explaining the six areas of Congregational Services. Teacher Scott Schmudlach, chairman, Floor Committee #13: Congregational Services C—Lutheran Schools, read Report 13-01. The committee and the presenters were thanked.

Rev. Brian Hackmann, chairman, Floor Committee #11: Congregational Services A—Congregational Counseling, Evangelism, Discipleship, read Report 11-01. The committee did not recommend approval of either Memorial 2021-03 or Memorial 2021-05; however, these memorials were read and the reasons for not approving them were shared. Note: Memorial 2021-04 was included in BORAM in error and was not assigned to Committee #11. The presenters were thanked, and the committee was dismissed with thanks.

Teacher James Grasby, chairman, Floor Committee #12: Congregational Services B—Worship, Special Ministries, read Report 12-01. Resolution 12-01, with a phrase added, "pending approval of funding from the Synodical Council," was moved and supported. The motion carried. Resolution 12-02 with the phrase added, "pending approval of funding from the Synodical Council," was moved and supported. The motion carried. The presenters and the committee were thanked.

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, presented his PowerPoint report. Rev. Adam Seelow, chairman of Floor Committee #4: Ministry of Christian Giving, read Report 04-01. The speakers and the committee were thanked.

Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS President, shared closing remarks. He thanked the delegates for their time and service. By God's grace the work of the synod points to God himself. He defined "synod," what it is and what it does. In the congregation and with 350,000 fellow Christians, "synod" carries out its functions sharing God's Word in its truth and purity. These are blessings we do not deserve—they are all by God's grace. Here we still stand. "Delegates, go home with renewed zeal and enthusiasm to carry out this work, which depends only on the gracious promise of God."

At 2:40 p.m., it was moved and supported to adjourn the 66th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The motion carried and the attendees stood and joined in the singing of the Doxology.

The closing worship service was held in the LPS chapel at 3 p.m. Presiding minister was Rev. Matthew Crass, Luther Preparatory School President. The preacher was Rev. Charles Westra, president of the South Atlantic District. His devotion was based on Matthew 19:32-39 and titled "We confess Christ." Prof. Lucas Krogmann served as the

organist, and instrumentalists beautified the service. Installed into their offices for a four-year term were Rev. James Huebner, first vice president, and Rev. Robert Pasbrig, recording secretary.

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





# Convention presentations

For a complete list of convention presentations, see the minutes, which begin on p. 71.

## Opening service sermon: "By God's grace, here we still stand! "

July 26, 2021

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Rev. Joel Voss

Text: Colossians 3:15-17

I'm one of those people who read them whenever I see them. Well, just what am I talking about? The lists that are entitled, "On This Date in History." I enjoy reading what happened 10, 25, 50, 100, and even 200 years ago. Those lists remind me how quickly things change. They also make me wonder just how that event occurred. Who were the persons involved? What influences caused what happened?

That's what serious historians do. They report not only what happened, but why and how it happened. It's called "causation" and it means that an historian will investigate all the factors involved in a particular historical event, rank those causes by importance, and then make a determination on how history occurred.

This synod convention's theme, "Here we stand," restates Luther's famous words spoken at the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521. In the intervening 500 years, many serious Luther scholars have analyzed the historical records of this diet and the political and religious environment surrounding it and have made their determinations on how and why this event occurred.

But this evening and throughout this convention, I'd like you to ponder how it came to be that you and I are still standing where Luther stood 500 years ago, firmly on the Word of God. What's the causation?

From a human perspective we could state that we stand on the shoulders of Lutheran giants, such as Luther himself, or his dear friend, Melancthon. We could point to great theologians in the age of Lutheran orthodoxy like Chemnitz, Calov, Gerhard, and Quenstedt. We could recall the valiant doctrinal efforts of our WELS brothers of a century or more ago, men such as Hoenecke, Pieper, and Schaller. These men taught us what it means to stand on the Word of God, just as Luther did.

But, as with anything and everything that pertains to our salvation and our relationship with the God of our salvation, the foundational causation is none other than our God and his unfathomable grace. It's grace, God's grace, all grace. By God's grace, here we still stand. Let's celebrate that astounding truth this evening on the basis of Paul's words to us in Colossians 3.

### **I. Living in the peace of Christ**

"When you are guilty, it's not your sins you hate, but yourself." That's a quotation from Anthony de Mello, who was a Jesuit priest. I know I don't agree with his theology, but I have seen what de Mello describes—a person so burdened with guilt that he hates himself. His sinful choices have brought numbing heartache to the people he loves. His exposure as a sordid sinner has destroyed his cherished relationships. And he hates himself for it.

The church of Luther's youth and young adulthood offered such a person only the possibility of human satisfaction for sin and guilt. Its *modus operandi* was the binding of consciences, not freeing them.

Our gracious Lord God alone provides the key that unlocks the shackles of sin's burden—the peace of Christ. Paul writes, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” The peace to which Paul refers is the peace that Christ won for us and is God's gift to us by faith in Jesus. That peace is the result of our God imputing to us the righteousness of Christ. That peace means all is well between us and the holy God.

And it shows itself as we interact with each other. Paul reminds us that we've been called to live in peace. By God's grace we are brothers and sisters in the faith. That's an eternal, blessed unity. The psalmist reminds us how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity (Psalm 133:1). That's God's will for our earthly lives.

But if Satan cannot succeed in causing us to remove our firm stance on the solid foundation of God's Word, then he will work tirelessly to incite us to quarrel, even over issues that don't really matter in the church. He will attempt incessantly to divide and conquer us.

Our God continually fortifies us against such satanic assaults with his peace. A peace that is ours by God's grace.

By God's grace, here we still stand living in the peace of Christ.

I'm not proud to admit that I have often viewed my stand on the word of God in terms of what it costs me—a relationship with someone who rejects what God clearly says in his Word, a night's sleep as I toss and turn, knowing what I need to say and do about a situation with a fellow Christian. It wasn't easy for Luther to stand firmly on the Word of God 500 years ago and it still isn't. But the peace of Christ enables us to stand firm. It rules in our hearts and minds as we serve our God faithfully, even as we recognize that our best efforts at serving our Savior are tainted by sin and need forgiveness on their own. But we live in the peace that Jesus established for us by his firm stance against every one of Satan's temptations and his Satan-crushing death on Calvary's cross. We live in the peace of knowing and believing that Christ's blood constantly covers our sin so that God delights in us and our efforts to serve him. That peace is ours by grace from our risen and ascended Lord Jesus. By God's grace, here we still stand!

## **II. Dwelling in the Word of Christ**

At the Diet of Worms, Luther had one request of those who opposed him: that they show him from God's Word where he was in error. Luther was convinced his doctrinal positions were correct. How could he be so sure? Because the Holy Spirit worked such conviction in him through that Word.

Paul encourages us to have the same approach to God's Word. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

As we listen to God's Word during our weekly corporate worship and reflect on it each day in private devotion, God's Word takes up residence in our hearts. As his Word dwells in us richly, Christ exhorts us to undertake three activities, activities which played a foundational role in Luther's reformation of the church.

First, teach the Word. Luther taught the Word at every opportunity because he had confidence that the Word works. By God's grace, we still have that same confidence, and, teaching the Word of Christ to others throughout the world is at the very heart of our synod's mission and purpose. By God's grace, here we still stand.

The second activity is not nearly as enjoyable as teaching the Word, but it's just as necessary. Standing firm on the Word of God means that we have the responsibility to admonish those who don't and won't. Our unity as brothers and sisters in the faith depends on evangelically dealing with those who, by their teaching or their sinful way of life, have strayed from the truth of God's Word. By God's grace, here we still stand.

Finally, God's will is for us to sing his praises and his great gospel truths. The Lutheran church has always been a singing church, and our beloved synod cherishes God's tremendous blessing of the gospel proclaimed in music. God-willing, late this fall, many of the congregations of our church body will be praising God in worship using our new hymnal, the culmination of years of work under God's blessing. And, as God's people raise their voices in song, they will realize that this is one of the ways God's Word describes life in the presence of their Savior in heaven, where all God's saints will join with the angels in praising him forever.

Teach the Word. Admonish with the Word. Sing the Word. By God's grace, here we still stand, dwelling in the Word of Christ.

What an opportunity this convention provides for evaluating what the blessing of God's Word means to us individually! If it is our greatest treasure—and I don't think anyone would disagree—then what is my response to it? What is my attitude towards it? If I have ever looked upon God's Word only professionally or academically, even for a moment, then I have despised it and am not worthy of the blessings it bestows. He should rightly rip it away from me. But God graciously chooses to treat me exactly opposite of the way I deserve. He graciously urges me to dwell in it and make it my heart's delight. That Word assures me of my forgiveness through Christ for a less-than-holy response to his holy Word. And that forgiving Word of Christ is ours at this convention. Cherish your opportunity to proclaim that Word in song to those gathered with you here tonight, and to ponder the glorious, saving truths of that Word in this convention's devotions, paper, and reports!

### **III. Working in the name of Christ**

And then go from this place, intent on working with and among your brothers and sisters in the faith at home. Paul states that very encouragement in the final verse of our text, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Paul encourages us to apply ourselves to two activities. The first is that we speak in the name of the Lord. To speak in the name of the Lord means that we speak words that are in keeping with his revelation of himself. In other words, we are only speaking what he has revealed to us. What's more, we are speaking all of what he has revealed to us. We are teaching others to obey everything he has commanded us (Matthew 28:19). That's the commission he gave us. By God's grace, here we still stand!

Secondly, Paul encourages us to act in the name of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, our world right now is offering us a golden opportunity to carry out this Christian function. We live in a world of division and opposition, of bigotry and hatred, of fear and anger. Who is better positioned to show the love of Jesus than a people who are committed to standing firmly on the word of Jesus? In the early days of Christianity when Christians were persecuted, the unbelieving world was impressed by the Christians' love for others. The Lord who enabled them to love by his love also lives in us. He gives us the ability to do what we cannot do on our own. Through his Word, he equips us to show his love to those he has placed around us, friend and foe alike.

We have work to do, work in God's kingdom. That work is not a burden; it's a gift of God's grace. By God's grace, here we still stand working in the name of Christ.

Think about it. Jesus loves you enough to make you his own at the cost of his holy, precious blood. Amazing! Think about it. Jesus loves you enough to include you in his command to work in his name for the spread of his saving kingdom. There is no more important work to do. By God's grace, it's the work of our synod. By God's grace, it's the work of this convention. By God's grace, here we still stand working in the name of Christ.

Sainted Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor, Prof. Edward Fredrich, once told his senior church history class, "A Lutheran church body tends to be orthodox for 100 years, maybe 125, then it slowly goes off the rails into heterodoxy."

If our beloved WELS remains orthodox after nearly 175 years, we must ask, "What's the causation?" It's grace, God's grace, all God's grace. By God's grace, here we still stand! We cannot do otherwise. May God help us! Amen.

# Essay:

## "Here we stand: Imitating Luther's faith"

July 27, 2021

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Rev. Earle Treptow

The writer to the Hebrews, in the closing chapter of his book, offered his readers this encouragement: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7 NIV). Most likely, he wanted his readers to call to mind those who had served as their spiritual leaders, what we might refer to as pastors. The writer desired that they consider carefully not only what their pastors had taught them, but also how those leaders had conducted themselves as children of God. Though they faced persecution for their Christian testimony, perhaps even martyrdom, they refused to abandon the Christian faith in fear. With their hearts fixed on the sure and certain promises of God, they remained faithful to the end. It was as if the writer to the Hebrews was saying, "You witnessed their faithfulness in trials. The Lord who enabled them to be faithful is your Lord, too. So imitate their trust in the promises of God, because you know how their story ended—God was glorified, God's people were encouraged, and they were blessed."

Though the writer to the Hebrews almost certainly was pointing his readers to spiritual leaders alongside whom they lived, it isn't wrong to think of the "leaders who spoke the word of God to you" in broader terms. None of us had the privilege of sitting at Martin Luther's feet as he lectured on the Psalms or preached at the city church in Wittenberg. Yet he has spoken the Word of God to us through his many writings that have remained to this day.<sup>1</sup> None of us witnessed personally how the Reformer conducted his life, unless watching Luther movies counts. (And I don't think it does.) At the same time, we do know quite a bit about how Luther carried out the ministry entrusted to him. While Luther was a sinner in desperate need of the grace of God in Christ, a fact he readily confessed, he still serves as a helpful model for us five hundred years later. We want to imitate his God-given confidence in the Lord's promises, with the prayer that the Lord would enable us to stand firm in Christian faith, confess the Savior's gospel with humble confidence, and trust him to work through us for the benefit of others and the glory of his name.

There is much for Christians to learn from the way Dr. Luther conducted himself throughout his years of ministry. This essay means to focus especially on what the Lord accomplished in and through the Reformer at the Diet of Worms, the quincentennial of which we celebrated earlier this year. There Luther stood before some of the world's most powerful leaders, with his life on the line. There he took a stand against the teachings of the Roman church that obscured the merits of Christ, deprived the Lord of the glory he deserved as the one who chooses to love undeserving sinners, and robbed consciences of the comfort God desired them to have. By reviewing the events of the Diet of Worms and the way the Reformer conducted himself, this essay aims to identify ways in which we can imitate Luther's faith today.

### Setting the stage for the Diet of Worms

#### *The Papal Bulls*

Pope Leo X issued a formal decree, dated June 15, 1520, condemning the errors of Martin Luther and his followers. Popularly known as *Exsurge Domine* (Arise, Lord), from the Latin words with which it began, the papal bull specifically listed forty-one errors to be found in the writings of Luther and his followers. Pope Leo characterized Luther as a "wild boar in the forest" whose teachings were "destructive, pernicious, scandalous, and seductive to pious minds." He wanted everyone to regard those teachings as "utterly condemned, reprobated, and rejected" by the church.

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1. This was not Luther's wish. In his Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings, Luther wrote, "I would have been quite content to see my books, one and all, remain in obscurity and go by the board." His desire was that his writings would lead people to search the Scriptures and make his writings superfluous. It is a good reminder for us as we read Luther today—his writings function best when they drive us to the Scriptures. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Volume 34 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 283. Hereafter *Luther's Works* will be noted by LW, followed by the volume and then the page number.

In addition, every one of Luther's books and pamphlets were to be "burned publicly and solemnly in the presence of the clerics and the people," as a testimony that Luther was "a true heretic." To ensure that the burned pamphlets were not replaced by other writings, Pope Leo forbade Luther to write, preach, or teach. By this decree the pope intended both to "cut off the advance of this plague and cancerous disease" and to call Luther to repentance. If Luther agreed to offer a formal recantation of what he had written, within sixty days of receipt of the papal bull, he would find mercy with the pope. Failing to do so would result in his being excommunicated.<sup>2</sup>

Though Luther became aware of the general contents of the papal decree by the beginning of October, he first received a copy on October 10. That marked the beginning of the sixty days in which he could either travel to Rome to renounce what he had written (and promise to cease with that teaching) or to submit the same in writing. After reading the papal decree, Luther wrote to his friend George Spalatin, who served as the assistant to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, expressing his disappointment. Since the bull condemned his teachings, all of which were aimed at pointing sinners to Christ alone for righteousness and life, Luther lamented: "Christ himself is condemned in it."<sup>3</sup> Luther considered the bull unbecoming of the pope, who should have been doing everything in his power to preserve the preaching of the gospel of Christ, not silence it.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of the Roman church, Luther believed, had become "monsters,"<sup>5</sup> whose rule would seem to spell the demise of faith and the Church. Had Luther allowed his eyes to tell him what to think about the situation, he could only have despaired. Instead, empowered by the Holy Spirit, he tuned his ears to the Lord's promises. The Reformer rejoiced in the Lord's promise to preserve his people from the devil's lies, even when spoken by the visible church. He also rejoiced that he had been considered worthy of suffering for so noble a cause.<sup>6</sup>

During the sixty days allotted for his recantation, Luther (unsurprisingly!) did what he had been forbidden to do. He wrote against the pope's decree. He asked those who found fault with his teachings to demonstrate his errors from the writings of the prophets and apostles, not the councils of the church. In his *Against the Execrable Bull of Antichrist*,<sup>7</sup> Luther laments, "This bull condemns me from its own word without any proof from Scripture, whereas I back up all my assertions from the Bible." His plea was simply this: "Let them show where I am a heretic, or dry up their spittle."<sup>8</sup> On December 10, 1520, Philip Melancthon, Luther's colleague on the university faculty, invited those in Wittenberg who supported the evangelical cause to gather for a book burning. Only it wouldn't be Luther's books, as the papal bull had commanded, but the books of canon law that had granted the pope authority over the Scriptures.

While the books were burning, Luther decided to throw into the fire the papal bull that threatened to excommunicate him. From a letter Spalatin wrote to Elector Frederick on December 3, Luther had at least a week earlier "decided to burn the bull publicly in the pulpit unless they mend their abuses."<sup>9</sup> He burned the bull, not as a rebel against the authorities or as a great hero who had no fear, but "with trembling and praying."<sup>10</sup> Never had he set out to position

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2. "Exsurge Domine: Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther, Pope Leo X-1520," <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo10/110exdom.htm>.

3. Martin Luther, *Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters*, Volume 1, translated and edited by Preserved Smith (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 365.

4. Timothy F. Lull and Derek R. Nelson, *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 116–17. Lull and Nelson write, "For Luther, the bull was really the last straw, the confirmation that the pope was the antichrist. The one person who should have praised Luther for championing the gospel instead condemned him and was about to cast him out of the church."

5. *Luther's Correspondence*, 366.

6. *Luther's Correspondence*, 366. "Yet I rejoice with my whole heart that for this best of causes I suffer evil, who am not worthy of being so tried."

7. Already in his letter to Spalatin on October 11, 1520, the day after he received the papal bull, Luther indicated that he believed the pope to be the Antichrist: "I am certain at length that the Pope is Antichrist and that the seat of Satan has been openly found." *Luther's Correspondence*, 366.

8. As quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 162.

9. *Luther's Correspondence*, 405.

10. *LW* 48:192. A month after the burning of the bull, in a letter addressed to John von Staupitz, Luther's confessor as an Augustinian monk, Luther wrote: "I have burned the books of the pope and the bull, at first with trembling and praying; but now I am more pleased with this than with any other action of my life, for [these books] are worse than I had thought."

himself against the church; his desire was a reformation of the church from within. He only wanted to ensure that the gospel of Christ would be preached in the church, not human tradition focused on the contributions human beings must make.<sup>11</sup> The bull seemed to indicate, however, that the Roman church had no interest in discussing the Scriptures' teaching. While the burning of a papal bull seems rather dramatic, an action that probably ought to have been accompanied by stirring music, it may not have been all that remarkable at the time. It's possible that only a few people recognized what Luther had done.<sup>12</sup> Luther biographer Heinz Schilling suggests that "only subsequently, reworked by the public and through memorialization, did Luther's action become a revolutionary repudiation of his threatened excommunication."<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, Luther's action was at best only symbolic. After all, burning a decree wouldn't put an end to the false teachings that had become prevalent in the church. Burning the bull wasn't going to give comfort to burdened consciences. It was, however, a statement. Eric Metaxas, in a recent popular biography of Luther, argues that "Luther's fiery statement was that he was turning the tables" by "symbolically excommunicating the false church that had thought to excommunicate him."<sup>14</sup> If the Roman church refused to listen to the Scriptures, to the voice of Jesus himself speaking there, then Luther knew it could not and would not speak for Jesus. Specifically, the Roman church would not proclaim the unconditional gospel: that the righteousness that counts before God comes through faith in Christ alone. And that was Luther's primary concern.

When Luther failed to meet the demands of *Exsurge Domine*, and even defied the decree by continuing to speak and write against the church's gospel-denying teachings, Pope Leo X acted. He issued another papal bull, this one called *Decet Romanum Pontificum* (It Befits the Roman Pontiff), on January 3, 1521. In that decree, Leo X dealt decisively with the Augustinian monk whom he accused of tearing apart "the seamless robe of our Redeemer and the unity of the orthodox faith." He declared Martin a heretic. What's more, the pope passed the same sentence on all "who have cared nought of their own salvation but publicly and in all men's eyes become followers of Martin's pernicious and heretical sect." By giving them the title "Lutheran," the Roman pontiff intended to do two things. First, he wanted to shame them, since they had foolishly chosen to follow a solitary man instead of the church. And second, he wanted to make it clear that they "shall likewise share his punishments." The punishments prescribed were significant. "The men in question are everywhere to be denounced publicly as excommunicated, accursed, condemned, interdicted, deprived of possessions and incapable of owning them. They are to be strictly shunned by all faithful Christians."<sup>15</sup> The pope and the Roman Curia were not going to engage a heretic in a doctrinal discussion. If Luther wished to retract his writings, they would listen. They had no interest in anything beyond that. The pope's decree carried significant weight even beyond the church. The authorities of the Holy Roman Empire typically followed the lead of the ecclesiastical authorities, which would have meant exile from the empire for Luther as well.<sup>16</sup>

*The emperor's dilemma: Should Luther be given a hearing?*

The leaders of the Holy Roman Empire would be meeting in Germany a few short weeks after Pope Leo X had excommunicated Luther. Emperor Charles V, the twenty-year-old who had just begun his reign in Germany in October 1520, arrived in Worms in early January 1521. Elector Frederick of Saxony, whose territory included Wittenberg, met with the emperor privately to request that Luther be given a hearing. Along with many other German electors, Frederick the Wise considered it inappropriate for Luther to be condemned without a hearing from impartial scholars. In fact, even before Leo had published the bull excommunicating Luther, Frederick had written to the

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11. In a letter written to Emperor Charles V on August 30, 1520, a month before he became aware of the details of the pope's decree, Luther emphasized his concern for the gospel of Christ: "I strove for nothing other than spreading the truth of the gospel against superstitious opinions stemming from human tradition." After three years of trying to engage in a discussion of how the church was obscuring the gospel with its teachings, Luther could sense what was going to happen: "There is only one thing prepared for me: to be annihilated, together with the whole gospel." LW 48:178.

12. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, translated by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 424.

13. Heinz Schilling, *Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval*, translated by Rona Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 165.

14. Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2017), 198.

15. "*Decet Romanum Pontificem*: Papal Bull of Excommunication of Martin Luther and his Followers, Pope Leo X-1521," <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo10/110decet.htm>.

16. Herman Selderhuis, *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 151.

emperor on December 20, 1520, asking him to “do nothing against Luther before he is heard, so that the truth whether he has erred in his writings might be established.”<sup>17</sup> Frederick was not, with his request, stating his personal agreement with Luther’s doctrinal position. Rather, he was insisting, as Schilling says, that this “was a matter of procedure and the procedure to be followed should be as determined by the law and constitution of the Holy Roman Empire and the privileges of the German estates, not by Roman ecclesiastical law.”<sup>18</sup> From Frederick’s perspective, peace and unity in Germany could only be preserved by following the established process, not by submitting to a unilateral mandate from Rome.

The German electors rejected a proposal to fall in line with the papal bull and ban Luther’s writings. They suggested, probably not inaccurately, that the common people might revolt if Luther, their hero,<sup>19</sup> didn’t receive a hearing at the diet. The electors’ plea for a hearing should not be understood, however, as an expression of agreement with, and support for, the Wittenberg professor’s theological positions.<sup>20</sup> What the electors had in common with Luther was this: they were concerned about papal authority and desirous of reform. It wasn’t, however, because they were convinced that the pope’s teachings contradicted the Scriptures and deprived God’s people of comfort. Instead, the electors had political and financial concerns. They believed the Roman Curia had abused its authority and taken advantage of the German churches. During the early weeks of the diet, which began in late January and concluded in early May, a committee outlined for the emperor 102 abuses that the church in Rome had perpetrated on the German church.<sup>21</sup> Those grievances needed to come before the diet, and one way to ensure that they did was to agitate for Luther to appear at Worms.<sup>22</sup> Though there were many important items on the agenda for Charles V’s first imperial diet, the German electors believed that Luther must receive a hearing.

The Roman church, predictably, held an entirely different opinion. The pope had already spoken on the Luther matter, and decisively, when he excommunicated Luther. Jerome Aleander, the papal ambassador, gave a three-hour speech in which he painted Luther as one intent on destroying the peace and unity of the church. If the emperor were to give Luther a hearing, Aleander argued, he would be giving credence to teachings that the pope himself had declared heretical. Most importantly, the secular authorities should “stay in their lane” and leave doctrinal matters to those who had the calling of doctrinal oversight. The Roman church was convinced, as Timothy Lull and Derek Nelson point out, that “only mischief could come from this kind of group—many of them laity, for that matter—dabbling in theological matters where they had neither jurisdiction nor competence.”<sup>23</sup> The emperor would provide a great service both to empire and church by supporting the church’s declaration and refusing to re-examine the rationale for the excommunication.<sup>24</sup>

Emperor Charles V, inexperienced both as a man and as a ruler, faced a difficult decision. He was, and desired to be, a faithful Roman Catholic, supportive of the church. Declaring Luther an outlaw without any hearing would have suited him fine. That was apparent, for instance, by his approach in those lands in which he had clear and obvious authority,

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17. *Luther’s Correspondence*, 429–30.

18. Schilling, 169.

19. A woodcut from the time by Hans Holbein the Younger depicted Luther as the “German Hercules.” Luther’s countrymen considered him a hero because, as Larry Mansch explains, “he alone had the courage to take on the Roman Catholic Church on behalf of the German people.” Larry D. Mansch and Curtis H. Peters, *Martin Luther: The Life and Lessons* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016), 107.

20. Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 101. “Delegates to the Diet who wanted to hear Luther out sympathized with his criticism of Rome more than with his theology.”

21. De Lamar Jensen, *Confrontation at Worms: Martin Luther and the Diet of Worms* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), 40.

22. Augustus Graebner goes so far as to say, “What was foremost in the minds of the many were not the articles of faith, but the grievances of the nation, and if it had not been for these, Luther would never have been summoned to appear before the Diet.” Augustus L. Graebner, “Luther’s Conduct at Worms,” *Theological Quarterly* 4:1 (January 1900), 32.

23. Lull and Nelson, 120.

24. Bainton, 169.

where he ordered that Luther's books be burned.<sup>25</sup> In November 1520, in a letter to Elector Frederick, Charles V acknowledged that he would like to have Luther's books "burned here and everywhere in the Holy Empire,"<sup>26</sup> for the sake of preserving unity. At the same time, the emperor needed the support of the German aristocrats, including Elector Frederick, so that he could strengthen his position as the Holy Roman Emperor. Without German support, he would have difficulty supporting his military campaigns against the Turks. In the end, as Scott Hendrix aptly observes, "the political risk of condemning Luther without a hearing was too great"<sup>27</sup> for Charles. On March 6, he extended an official invitation to Luther. In deference to Elector Frederick, who had expressed concern in December 1520 about having the professor travel to Worms because of what might happen to him,<sup>28</sup> the emperor included with that invitation a letter of safe conduct. He threatened to use the empire's power to punish any who might injure Luther either on the way to Worms or back to Wittenberg.<sup>29</sup>

In the invitation, which reached the professor in the final days of March 1521, Charles V asked "our dear and pious Dr. Martin Luther" to come to Worms because "the Estates of the Holy Empire, here assembled, have undertaken and decreed to obtain information about certain doctrines and certain books which formerly originated with you."<sup>30</sup> The invitation must have sounded promising to Luther. At the very least, it sounded different than the "invitation" Pope Leo X issued in June 1520. The pope offered no opportunity for discussion, insisting only that Luther recant perpetually what he had been teaching. The emperor, however, made no mention of recantation. By all appearances, Charles was following through on his initial proposal to Elector Frederick in November 1520, when the emperor mentioned inviting Luther to Worms where he could be "sufficiently examined by learned and wise persons."<sup>31</sup> Since the emperor and the estates summoned him "to obtain information" about his teaching, Luther must have surmised that he would have the chance to demonstrate that he drew his teachings solely from the Scriptures.

*The question facing Luther: Should he travel to Worms?*

It's important to note that the emperor had extended an *invitation*. He had not issued a *command* under threat of punishment. In other words, Luther did not have to appear before the gathering of the Holy Roman Empire. In fact, a good argument could have been made that Luther should decline the invitation. Those who felt Luther should stay in Wittenberg pointed to what had happened to Bohemian reformer Jan Huss. A century earlier Emperor Sigismund had invited Huss to the Council of Constance, with the promise that he would be protected in his travels both to and from the Council. While in Constance, however, Huss was imprisoned. Some seven months later he was burned at the stake because he had been declared a heretic. Emperor Charles' promise of safe conduct, then, could not be considered a guarantee of safety, particularly when Pope Leo X had already declared Luther a heretic. Traveling to Worms seemed unwise at best and foolish at worst, since there was so much work to be done in reforming the church and Luther's leadership, humanly speaking, played a critical role.

In the months leading up to the Diet of Worms, Luther had been thinking about what he would do if he were called to appear. On behalf of Elector Frederick, Spalatin asked Luther that specific question in December 1520. Luther answered that he would undertake the long journey to Worms and offered several reasons for doing so. First, he recognized the authority of the emperor as God's representative. If the emperor summoned him, he would hear the Lord's voice behind it. Second, he trusted that though his enemies may plot evil and even seek to kill him, the Lord could protect him, just as he had done for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Third, he did not want to give the enemies of the gospel an opportunity to say, if he refused to travel to Worms, "He's afraid to stand up for what he says he believes. If he's not willing to suffer for it, he must not believe it." Knowing that he did not, on his own, have the strength to confess in the face of danger, Luther prayed, "May the merciful Christ prevent such cowardice on our part

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25. Schilling, 167–68.

26. *Luther's Correspondence*, 398.

27. Hendrix, 101.

28. *Luther's Correspondence*, 430.

29. *Luther's Correspondence*, 483–84.

30. *Luther's Correspondence*, 482.

31. *Luther's Correspondence*, 399.



and such boasting on their part. Amen.”<sup>32</sup> In the end, Luther recognized that people in Germany might be tempted to abandon the faith if he wavered in doubt concerning the teaching of the Scriptures: “You may expect everything of me except flight and recanting,” he told Spalatin. “I do not want to escape, much less recant; may the Lord Jesus strengthen me in this. I could do neither without endangering piety and the salvation of many.”<sup>33</sup> In the final analysis, it was his love for Christ’s gospel and his concern for all who hear the gospel that moved him to accept the invitation to appear before the diet.<sup>34</sup>

On March 19, 1521, about a week before he received the invitation from the emperor, Luther sent a letter to Spalatin in which he expressed his willingness to attend the diet, if Charles summoned. Only one thing would stop him from coming. It wasn’t concern for his life. In fact, if Charles called him to the diet to kill him, Luther was more than ready to make the trip. With Christ’s help, he would not flee the battle. The only reason he would decline to attend is if he were going to be called only for the sake of recanting what he had written. Making the trek to Worms would in that case be a colossal waste of time, because, he said, he could recant just as easily from Wittenberg.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Luther travels under the Lord’s protecting hand*

That Luther decided to go to Worms gives some indication of how he read the invitation from Emperor Charles. He did not think he was being called solely to recant what he had written, but to provide “information about certain doctrines” and discuss what he taught from the Scriptures. On April 2, he left Wittenberg for the 320-mile, two-week journey to Worms. Crowds of people received him enthusiastically at many places along the way, a testimony to the fact that his writings had been circulated widely. Many thronged to meet Luther, “in some ways the first celebrity of modern culture,”<sup>36</sup> in Metaxas’ words, to see with their own eyes “the miracle-man who was so brave as to oppose the Pope and all the world, who held the Pope to be a God against Christ,”<sup>37</sup> as Friedrich Myconius, a colleague of Luther, described it. During the trip Luther preached to large gatherings in Erfurt, Gotha, and Eisenach. Luther himself spoke of the journey to Worms as a triumphal procession, like Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, Luther faced several challenges during his journey to Worms. In Weimar, he learned that the emperor had issued a mandate that all of Luther’s books were to be sequestered. Anyone who dared to sell or share his books would be subject to punishment. More troubling to Luther than the sequestration of his writings was that the emperor’s decree indicated that “the condemnation of Luther’s cause was already a fact.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, Spalatin sent word to Luther regarding the discussion occurring among at least some at Worms, that the safe conduct would only have to be honored if Luther recanted. Concerned that condemnation and death awaited Luther at the diet, Spalatin advised the professor not to enter Worms.<sup>40</sup> Though Luther must have wondered how impartial a hearing he would receive and how open his inquisitors would be to the information he would provide, he nevertheless chose

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32. *Luther’s Correspondence*, 189.

33. *Luther’s Correspondence*, 190.

34. Here I might differ with Scott Hendrix, who suggests that, “One simple argument seems to have carried the day. If Luther did not go to Worms, his enemies might call him a coward.” Hendrix, 101. Hendrix gives the impression that Luther’s concern was primarily for how he might be viewed, rather than the gospel.

35. Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as He Lived and Breathed: Recollections of the Reformer* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 93. Kolb offers a translation of sorts of Luther’s letter to Spalatin found in *Weimar Ausgabe (WA) Briefe* 2:289, Nr. 389.

36. Metaxas, 204.

37. As quoted in Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Random House, 2017), 166.

38. Bainton, 179. After the positive reception in Erfurt, Luther said: “I have had my Palm Sunday. I wonder whether this pomp is merely a temptation or whether it is also a sign of my impending passion.” Bainton does not provide a reference for the statement. Brecht speaks of Luther being “moved by the possibility of an impending martyrdom.” Brecht, 449. . Brecht, 446. . Roper, 450, note 27.

39. Selderhuis, 153, referring to something Luther said at table in 1533 as he recounted the situation. *WA Tischreden* 3:3357a.

40. Roper, 166.

to continue the journey. He did so trembling.<sup>41</sup> At Eisenach, Luther had such a high fever that some of his colleagues feared he might die. Perhaps, as Lyndal Roper suggests, “Anxiety over the looming trial took its toll”<sup>42</sup> and showed itself in the various sicknesses he experienced during the journey.

Heiko Oberman, in his book *Martin Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, dismisses the picture of a conquering hero traveling to Worms with “unshakable resolve,” with no fear of anyone or anything. Luther was rather “a sorely tested man,”<sup>43</sup> who recognized that the devil was hounding him with sickness and harassing him with fear to turn him away from a clear confession of the truth.<sup>44</sup> Luther knew his struggle was “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV). In a letter to Spalatin written just a few days before he was to arrive in Worms, Luther wrote, “Satan has done everything to hinder me with more than one disease. All the way from Eisenach to here I have been sick; I am still sick in a way which previously has been unknown to me.”<sup>45</sup>

The devil’s repeated attacks, however, did not stop him. Luther entered the city of Worms, despite his own weakness and fear, under the Lord’s protecting hand. “But Christ lives,” he wrote to Spalatin, “and we shall enter Worms in spite of all the gates of hell and the powers in the air.”<sup>46</sup> His confidence rested not in the promise of the safe conduct granted by the emperor or the protection of Elector Frederick, but the Risen Savior’s promise to be with him and to rule over everything for the benefit of his people. On April 16, around 10:00 a.m., Luther and his traveling companions finally reached Worms. A trumpet from the church tower announced their arrival and some two thousand people greeted him loudly in the streets, much to the chagrin of Aleander, who thought Luther ought to be burned at the stake, not cheered.

## Luther appears before the Diet of Worms

### *The initial appearance*

The next morning Luther received word that he was to appear at 4:00 p.m. for a special hearing at the bishop’s residence, where the emperor was staying.<sup>47</sup> Though not an official meeting, it remained a setting with which the monk from Wittenberg was not at all familiar. No one could have blamed him for being nervous about facing a gathering of the politically powerful, particularly when he had to have sensed “that both his life and his cause were at stake.”<sup>48</sup> Yet, out of place as he might have felt, he stood ready to provide the “information” the emperor said the estates would be seeking.

To Luther’s great disappointment, no one asked him to present what he taught from the Scriptures. Instead, Johann von der Ecken, who was presiding over the meeting on behalf of the archbishop of Trier, set some ground rules. He explained that the emperor had summoned Luther for two reasons: first, to see if Luther would acknowledge that he had written the books published under his name and second, to see if Luther wished to retract them. Luther was to answer questions with a simple yes or no; there were to be no speeches. Von der Ecken then pointed to a table that had a pile of Luther’s books stacked on it and asked, “Are these your writings?” After the titles were read, Luther acknowledged them as his books and confessed that he had also written others. When von der Ecken asked Luther point blank if he wished to recant what he had written, Luther did not provide an immediate answer. He had indicated repeatedly in letters sent to Spalatin and others, some just days before, that he would not recant unless

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41. Selderhuis, 153, referring to something Luther said at table in 1533 as he recounted the situation. WA Tischreden 3:3357a.

42. Roper, 166.

43. Heiko Oberman, *Martin Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwartzbart (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 199.

44. Schilling supports Oberman’s view: “As Luther understood his travelling to Worms as a mission in the cause of salvation, he saw the devil behind every and all misfortunes that occurred along the way.” 175.

45. LW 48:198.

46. LW 48:198.

47. Hendrix, 104.

48. E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 502.

proved wrong from Scripture. One might have expected Luther to say, in a loud voice for all to hear, “No. I cannot and will not recant.” Instead, speaking with a subdued, soft voice that made it difficult for observers to understand him<sup>49</sup> and disappointed even his supporters,<sup>50</sup> Luther suggested that the question was more simply posed than answered. The question required a careful and thoughtful response, he said, because it dealt with the most important matters: the salvation of souls and the Word of God. For that reason, Luther respectfully asked his imperial majesty “for time to think, in order to satisfactorily answer the question without violence to the divine Word and danger to my own soul.”<sup>51</sup>

After consulting with the emperor and princes about Luther’s request, von der Ecken returned with a response. First, he warned Luther that by propagating his personal opinions he was disrupting the unity of the church and leading many faithful people astray. Then he scolded Luther for not being prepared to answer the question posed to him—a trained theologian should always be ready to confess. In addition, the secretary argued, Luther knew very well that he had been summoned to answer the recantation question above all. Though Luther did not deserve additional time to consider the question, von der Ecken said, the emperor would show him mercy and give him a day. The one stipulation was that Luther was to present his answer orally, not in writing. The leaders of the empire knew how well Luther had utilized the technology of the day—the printing press—to get his message out, and they wanted to ensure that he did not “repair to his room to summon from his pen yet another mesmerizing manifesto that would doubtless be printed over and over and read far and wide.”<sup>52</sup> They remained uninterested in hearing Luther explain his teachings.

Luther’s conduct on April 17 seemed strange, both to those who attended the diet and to those who reflect on it five hundred years later. Why didn’t Luther give an immediate answer to the question about his willingness to recant his writings? After all, Luther had to have expected the question was coming. At the very least, he should have inferred that from the emperor’s recent order that Luther’s writings be sequestered. In addition, Luther knew that the papal legate was in the emperor’s ear, insisting that it would be inappropriate to give a heretic opportunity to present his case. Finally, Luther had to realize that young Charles V wanted to show himself faithful to the church at Rome. The emperor could hardly defend Luther when the church had already passed its sentence on him.

Could it be that Luther was orchestrating the situation so that he could address the diet in plenary session? Was he concerned that he could be sent to the stake already that very night if he refused to recant, and he wanted to be certain that he was ready to die confessing what he had written? Did he want to craft “an answer that would also be an argument”<sup>53</sup>? Maybe the answer is as simple as this: Luther did not give an immediate answer because he was not prepared to face the question of recantation as the first order of business. The emperor’s invitation had given Luther reason to think that there would be a discussion of the teachings of Scripture, because they were seeking “information” about his writings. Luther anticipated that the emperor would assemble a dream team of scholars to destroy him in debate and demonstrate conclusively that Luther’s teachings conflicted with what the church has taught always and everywhere.<sup>54</sup> Had such scholars proved from Scripture that he was misleading people, he would

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49. Brecht, 453. Robert Kolb observes, “Fearless criticism of men of higher station that later typified his public utterances had not yet germinated in his disposition.” Kolb, *Martin Luther as He Lived and Breathed*, 84.

50. Schilling, 182. “Even the Saxon elector, who had consistently refused to meet the rebellious monk in person and now in Worms saw him for the first time close up, was visibly disappointed.” Selderhuis mentions that Luther “heard from supporters that his performance had not been impressive. It had been difficult to hear him, and he had not shown a strong defense.” Selderhuis, 157. Jerome Aleander reported, in a letter written that evening, that while many considered Luther “a pious man, full of the Holy Ghost,” it appeared to him that Luther had “lost considerable reputation in the regard of all.” *Luther’s Correspondence*, 527.

51. *LW* 32:107.

52. Metaxas, 212.

53. Mansch and Peters, 117, quoting from Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 276.

54. Luther indicated as much in a letter he sent to Lucas Cranach on April 28, 1521, eleven days after his first appearance: “I thought His Imperial Majesty would have assembled one or fifty scholars and overcome this monk in a straightforward manner. But nothing else was done there than this: Are these your books? Yes. Do you want to renounce them or not? No. Then go away!” *LW* 48:201–2.

have been ready to recant those teachings. In addition, what Luther said in response to von der Ecken's question indicates that he was concerned about speaking rashly, in a way that might damage souls or rob God of the glory he deserves. He wanted to be in command of his thoughts, so that he would say neither too much nor too little. So great was his love for the Word of God, in which he learned of the righteousness God gives through faith in Christ, that he wanted to express himself carefully. If he refused to recant, it wouldn't be because he was a stubborn German who enjoyed being contrary, but because of his love for the gospel of Christ, which addressed his fundamental need as a sinner.

That evening brothers in Christ encouraged Luther not to fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. They pointed him to the Lord's promise to give his witnesses the words to say when they are called before kings.<sup>55</sup> Luther spent time in prayer, pleading with the Lord for strength to carry out his calling as a confessor of the truth. Recognizing that he was a mere instrument in the Lord's hand, he prayed,

Thou who art my God, support me in this struggle against the reason and wisdom of all the world. Do it! Thou must do it, Thou alone. This affair is not mine, but Thine. I have no personal business here with these great lords of the world. Indeed, I, too, would spend my days in undisturbed comfort and peace. But, O Lord, this affair is Thine, and it is righteous and of eternal importance. Stand by me, Thou faithful and eternal God!<sup>56</sup>

In a letter he wrote that evening, he revealed what he intended to say the next day, as the Lord stood by him: "With Christ's help, however, I shall not in all eternity recant the least particle."<sup>57</sup>

#### *The second appearance*

Luther was to appear at 4:00 p.m. on April 18, again at the bishop's residence, but it ended up beginning at 6:00 p.m. and in a larger hall, before even more dignitaries. Luther's "tremor" at his first appearance provided this unique opportunity: He got to address the diet in plenary session.<sup>58</sup> By all appearances, Luther was a changed man on that second day. No longer awed by the setting, he spoke with more boldness. He began with an apology for his appearance the previous day, explaining that monks who live in seclusion have no experience addressing dignitaries in court. He then addressed the recantation question, explaining that it could not be simply answered, because he had written different kinds of books. Three kinds, to be exact. The first addressed matters of Christian piety and morals. Even those who opposed some of his teachings recognized that those books were helpful. To retract those books would be to deny the truths of Scripture and the universal teaching of the Christian church, and Luther could not do that. In the second kind of book, he wrote against the papacy, whose false teachings contradicted the gospel and "tortured" the consciences of God's people. In addition, the papacy had unfairly taken property and wealth from the German nation, without consideration of their needs. To retract the books of this second kind would be to express support for their wickedness and to encourage its continuance. In the third type he had written against individuals who supported the Roman church's teaching and practice. He admitted that he had occasionally spoken more strongly than he should have, considering his calling as a teacher in the church. At the same time, he wrote the way he did because of his concern for the gospel of Christ, to which conditions were being added. To recant this third type would be to encourage the oppression of God's people to continue. If, however, he could be shown from the Scriptures where he had taught falsely, he would recant and would be the first to throw the books into the fire.<sup>59</sup>

Luther then addressed the warning he had received, that he was disrupting the unity of the church by his teaching. He viewed the dissension differently than they, considering it natural and necessary wherever the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed. In fact, he said, to "see dissension arise because of the Word of God is to me clearly the most joyful aspect of all in these matters,"<sup>60</sup> because Jesus himself said that he had not come to bring peace, but a sword.

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55. *LW* 32:108.

56. Ewald M. Plass, *This is Luther: A Character Study* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1948), 189. This is Plass's translation of Luther's prayer as it is found in the St. Louis edition of Luther's Works, Volume 10, 1422.

57. *Luther's Correspondence*, 200.

58. Bainton, 183.

59. This is a summary of what can be found in *LW* 32:109–13, which provides a transcript of Luther's statement.

60. *LW* 32:111.

The peace and unity that please God come from believing and confessing what the Lord says in his Word, not by teaching contrary to it. Allowing some false teaching for the sake of outward peace invariably leads to other evils.

Though he had been told that there would be no debate, Luther tried to draw the emperor's representative into a discussion by the distinction he made between his books. Mission unaccomplished! Von der Ecken refused to discuss it. He rather went on the attack, accusing Luther of not making a clear enough distinction about his second kind of book, in which he had addressed papal tyranny. The books Luther had written in response to *Exsurge Domine* were "far more abominable and execrable than those written earlier, and deserve to be condemned."<sup>61</sup> If Luther wanted his writings to be preserved, then he should remove the false teachings included in them. Otherwise, even that which he believed to be sound teaching would be burned up and all memory of him blotted out. Von der Ecken then sought to put Luther in his place: "Do not, I entreat you, Martin, do not claim for yourself that you, I say, that you are the one and only man who has knowledge of the Bible, who has the true understanding of holy Scripture. . . . Do not regard yourself as wiser than all others."<sup>62</sup>

*Luther takes his stand because of the gospel*

At that point, von der Ecken, in the name of the emperor, demanded that Martin provide an unambiguous (without horns or teeth) response to the question of recanting what he had written. In response Luther spoke the famous words:

Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.<sup>63</sup>

He could have just said, "No." But he was a teacher and a preacher, so a one-word answer would not suffice. What particularly shines through is the tenacious hold the Scriptures had on Luther. He said that he was bound (captured/seized/conquered) by the Scriptures he had cited in his writings. While granting that Luther was speaking figuratively, his description of the Scriptures' hold on him is revealing.

The living and active Word of God had conquered his heart. For so long Luther had an inadequate conception of God and the way to life, thinking it was incumbent on him to produce a righteousness by which he could stand before the righteous God. Until, that is, the Holy Spirit enlightened him by the gospel of Christ. Years later, as he reflected on the Lord's grace in leading him to the truth, the Reformer pointed to his wrestling with Romans 1:17: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" He confessed that he had hated the expression "the righteousness of God," because he could think only of the righteous God demanding a righteousness from sinners that they could not achieve, no matter how fervently they struggled. In his mercy, the Lord helped Luther to see that "the righteousness of God" revealed in the gospel is the righteousness God gives. That, Luther said, changed everything for him. "Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me."<sup>64</sup> As he enabled Luther to believe that he was righteous before God through faith in Christ, the Lord filled his heart with a newfound zeal for the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures revealed the glorious message of forgiveness in Christ and freed him from the foolish idea that he must earn righteousness by his obedience, they would hold central place not only in his heart but also in his preaching, teaching, and writing. He could not escape the Scriptures. And, because of the Spirit's work, he had no desire to do so.

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61. LW 32:127.

62. LW 32:129.

63. LW 32:112–13.

64. LW 34:33.

Luther's insistence on the Scriptures alone<sup>65</sup> being able to establish and judge doctrine, then, resulted from the gospel capturing Luther's heart. Martin Brecht, author of a three-volume biography of Luther, offers this observation: "The absolute commitment to the Scriptures, however, was not merely an empty formal allegiance to a principle. Rather it was precisely the Word of God which had freed him from guilt and then also from false human impositions. He could not repudiate the Word which promised him salvation."<sup>66</sup> The faith the gospel worked in his heart placed him willingly under the Scriptures. What Luther had heard from popes and councils had too often contradicted the gospel of righteousness through faith in Christ, thereby robbing God of the glory he deserved as the Savior of unworthy sinners and depriving consciences of the comfort the Lord desired them to have.

Luther refused to recant because he believed it was neither safe nor right to go against conscience. If we think of conscience the way many understand it today, we will miss the point. Luther was not a twenty-first century citizen of the United States demanding the freedom to believe whatever he felt was right. He was not insisting that no one had the right to question his personal perspective on things or compel him to act contrary to his private views. When Luther spoke of conscience, he had in mind, as Robert Kolb says, "his entire disposition or orientation toward God and life"<sup>67</sup> based on what he had heard about the righteousness of Christ in the Scriptures. From his study of the Bible, Luther knew what the Savior-God wanted to be taught and preached, for the glory of his name and the salvation of sinners. As Luther confessed, his "conscience was captive to the Word"<sup>68</sup> of God."

Again, the language grabs our attention. The Scriptures through which the Spirit had granted him the righteousness that avails on the Last Day had taken his conscience captive. James Nestingen builds on Kolb's definition of conscience when he writes, "Luther was a sinner who had been so grasped by grace that his whole sense of himself in relation to God and others was captive by the word of God."<sup>69</sup> He could not escape what God taught, whether he found the Scriptures' doctrine convenient and pleasing or not. In other words, Luther was not saying that his conscience was the final authority. The Word of God held that position, because the Word informed his conscience. Metaxas rightly observes that Luther was not "asserting the freedom of the individual to do as he pleased. He was asserting the freedom of the individual to do as God pleased."<sup>70</sup> To act contrary to the Lord's commands or believe something that the Scriptures condemns is not freedom, but slavery.<sup>71</sup> The conscience is only free, as Oberman says, "once God has freed and 'captured' it"<sup>72</sup> through the Scriptures. The Reformer could not recant what he had written without going against the Scriptures and therefore, also, against his conscience, unless he could be shown from the Scriptures where he had erred.

After declaring that he could not and would not recant without being shown his errors from Scripture, he spoke the words from which this convention got its theme: "I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen." There is significant debate among scholars about which of those words Luther spoke. The individuals who prepared the official transcript of the meeting did not include "I cannot do otherwise, here I stand." The Weimar edition of *Luther's*

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65. When Luther said that he would have to be "convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason," he was not saying that the Scriptures and reason were two separate items that could move him to recant. Robert Rosin helpfully explains that the clear reason Luther had in mind was "a reasoning ability that had been shaped by the word. . . . At bottom, since clear reason is that which is aligned with the word, the actual bottom line, the foundation, is simply Scripture—*sola Scriptura*." Robert Rosin, "Luther at Worms and the Wartburg: Still Confessing," *Concordia Journal* (Spring 2019), 64.

66. Brecht, 461.

67. Kolb, *Martin Luther as He Lived and Breathed*, 85.

68. Theodor Dieter catches the plural Luther used to speak of the Scriptures when he writes, "He refused to recant because his conscience was 'caught' in the words (plural!) of God." Theodor Dieter, "Another Quincentennial: The Diet and Edict of Worms (1521)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 35 (2021), 4.

69. James A. Nestingen, *Martin Luther: A Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003), 46.

70. Metaxas, 221.

71. As Jesus says in John 8:34 (NIV), "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

72. Oberman, 204.

*Works* has Luther's address entirely in Latin, save for the words, "I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, God help me. Amen," which are written in German, indicating that they may have been a later addition.<sup>73</sup> Only one account of the meeting, the one published in Wittenberg, includes the words. Schilling intimates that publishers in Wittenberg may have "ingeniously sharpened and extended" the record of Luther's speech, so that "this defiant version became indelibly associated with Luther"<sup>74</sup> as it was read throughout Germany. At the same time, the Wittenberg edition was prepared by Spalatin, likely with the assistance of Luther, which would argue for seeing the account as accurate. It could be that Luther said the words, but only a few heard them because of the uproar following his refusal to recant. Lull and Nelson contend that Luther probably spoke the words, but that early editors chose "to omit so brazen a comment made by a mere friar."<sup>75</sup> In the end, it does not really matter if he spoke those words. He decidedly took a stand on the Scriptures.<sup>76</sup> Doing otherwise was not an option because the Word of God had seized his heart and captured his conscience.

### The immediate aftermath

That scene is a filmmaker's dream. A monk from the little town of Wittenberg stands up to the powerful leaders of the Holy Roman Empire and drops the mic. Stirring music follows and the scene fades to black. The End. (*He did say, "Amen," after all!*) While his confession ranks as a critical point of the story, it was not the end. When Luther finished speaking, von der Ecken shouted another word of rebuke as the participants prepared to depart from a crowded and stuffy meeting area: "Lay aside your conscience, Martin; you must lay it aside because it is in error; and it will be safe and proper for you to recant."<sup>77</sup> As Luther left the meeting hall, the Spanish soldiers Charles V had brought with him to Worms called for him to be burned at the stake. But Luther returned safely to his quarters, where he would wait to see if the emperor would honor the promise of safe conduct back to Wittenberg or if his confession might cost him his life.<sup>78</sup>

#### *The emperor's view of Luther*

Charles V was not impressed. Finding Luther's stubbornness and arrogance appalling, Charles took a stand against him, and swiftly. That very evening he wrote a response in French, in his own hand, which was translated into German and read to the assembled estates the next day. In it he expressed his loyalty to the Roman church and his commitment to support the church's condemnation of all heretics, including the Augustinian from Wittenberg. The emperor refused to believe that Luther alone could be right: "For it is certain that a lone friar errs in his opinion which is against all of Christendom, both in times past—for a thousand years and more—and in the present, according to which opinion all of said Christendom would be, and always would have been, in error."<sup>79</sup> The emperor called on all present to join him in defending the Catholic faith against heresy. Though he promised to honor the order of safe conduct, he insisted that he would thereafter proceed against Luther; "a notorious heretic,"<sup>80</sup> whom he never wished to hear again. Charles spoke

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73. At the same time, nearly all scholars and biographers of Luther agree that he did say the words, "God help me. Amen."

74. Schilling, 184.

75. Lull and Nelson, 130, note 35.

76. Kolb, 85: "Accounts of the time, including Luther's own, do not mention the words 'here I stand, I cannot do anything else,' although that phrase captures what the Wittenberg professor was actually doing." Metaxas, 215: "Even if Luther did not speak them, they nonetheless perfectly encapsulate his position, which is surely why they have stuck." Roper, 172: "If he did not say these words, this was the phrase that soon became famous. It certainly encapsulated the spirit of his appearance."

77. LW 32:130.

78. Here I might differ with the view proposed by Hartmut Lehmann, who, while acknowledging Luther's subjective fears, argues that "there was probably no real danger to Luther in Worms," and that Luther's appearance at Worms ought not be considered "heroic." Hartmut Lehmann, "Demythologizing the Luther Myths 1883-1983," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30 (2016): 417-19.

79. Jensen, 57.

80. Jensen, 57.

strongly both because of his personal conviction as a faithful member of the Roman church<sup>81</sup> and because he considered doctrinal unity critical to his goals as the leader of the Holy Roman Empire.

After the emperor's declaration had been read, the electoral council voted to declare Luther an outlaw. Luther's supporters, however, objected, because they did not believe he had received a proper hearing. They advocated for commissioning a group of princes and professors to meet with Luther and address his errors from the Scriptures. Charles consented to their request, perhaps concerned about a possible peasants' revolt, but he allowed them only three days to conduct these private meetings. In a letter written to Count Albert of Mansfeld on May 3, the Reformer provided a list of the men with whom he met in the days following his confession. Many pleaded with Luther to recant for the sake of peace and unity. They asked him to "submit [his] books and the whole affair to his Imperial Majesty and the Estates."<sup>82</sup> The Reformer responded privately as he had publicly. He would gladly submit his writings to everyone, "provided only that nothing should be recognized or decided contrary to the holy gospel."<sup>83</sup> He explained that he had not spoken against popes or councils because of their scandalous acts, but because of their false doctrine. Sinful actions he could overlook in love, but false teaching he could not overlook, because that would be "harmful to the gospel and the faith."<sup>84</sup> Love for the gospel compelled him to stand firm.

On April 25 the emperor, through his messengers, informed Luther that, because he had stubbornly persisted in his position, action would be taken against him. The emperor promised to honor the safe conduct, which gave Luther twenty-one days to return to Wittenberg. He added this stipulation: Luther was not to preach or write along the way. To that Luther said, "I will do all that pleases his Majesty, but I will leave God's Word free, as St. Paul says: 'The Word of God is not bound.'"<sup>85</sup> Luther had to obey God rather than the emperor. Elector Frederick, to preserve Luther's life, arranged for Luther to be abducted in the Thuringian Forest and taken to the Wartburg castle for safekeeping.

After informing the estates that he, as the protector and defender of the church, intended to proceed against Luther, the emperor directed Aleander to prepare a draft of an edict against Luther. On May 8 Aleander's draft was ready to go to print. The emperor, however, requested some changes to that original document and asked that it first be presented to the estates, who would have to implement its orders. On May 21 the diet was officially recessed, and most participants began to return home without ever seeing the final wording of the document. The minority that remained in Worms approved the edict a few days later, with the emperor signing it on May 26. The edict was officially dated May 8, giving the impression that the whole diet approved. One ought not make too much of that, however, since the imperial estates had agreed to the edict and the emperor could have issued it on his own.<sup>86</sup>

#### *The Edict of Worms*

The Edict of Worms pulled no punches in its description of Luther. He was "a demon in the appearance of a man, clothed in religious habit to be better able to deceive mankind"<sup>87</sup> and "possessed by some evil spirit."<sup>88</sup> By his teaching,

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81. Schilling makes an interesting distinction between Luther and Charles by the headings he uses in the chapter in which he addresses the events of the Diet of Worms. One heading refers to Luther: "A Conscience Held Captive by the Word of God," 180. The next speaks of Charles V: "A Sovereign Held Captive by His Noble Ancestry," 185. Charles was mindful of his ancestors who were, as he described them in his initial formal reaction to Luther's appearance, "all to the death true sons of the Roman church, defenders of the Catholic faith and of its customs, decrees, rituals and ordinances." Jensen, 57.

82. *Luther's Correspondence*, 557.

83. *Luther's Correspondence*, 557.

84. *Luther's Correspondence*, 557.

85. *Luther's Correspondence*, 559.

86. Brecht, 473.

87. Jensen, 89.

88. Jensen, 99.



the edict contended, Luther “institutes a way of life by which people do whatever they please, like beasts,”<sup>89</sup> and “labors to trouble and demolish all religious peace and charity.”<sup>90</sup> He was “an obstinate, schismatic heretic,”<sup>91</sup> who “would not revoke one thing of what he had written until he was convinced otherwise by the Holy Scriptures or by divine authority.”<sup>92</sup> Faithful citizens of the empire were to apprehend Luther and bring him before the emperor to be punished. (The edict did not authorize individuals to kill Luther.) Those who assisted in his capture, the edict promised, would be “rewarded generously for their good work.”<sup>93</sup> Luther’s books were not to be printed, sold, read, or owned, but rather burned publicly, so that the Catholic faith might be preserved. Any who defied the emperor’s decree and supported Luther were also to be punished, with their goods confiscated.

In anticipation of such an edict, Elector Frederick arranged for Luther to be seized as he was returning to Wittenberg. In the Wartburg castle Luther could be protected from those eager to earn a generous reward from the emperor. While the edict did make Luther an outlaw, it was never published in Wittenberg or anywhere in Electoral Saxony and therefore never enforced there. It seems likely that Charles and Elector Frederick arrived at a secret agreement to ensure that the edict would not go into legal effect in Electoral Saxony.<sup>94</sup> In the end, Charles could show himself faithful to the Roman church in supporting the papal bull excommunicating Luther, thereby securing the approval of the papacy, and a friend to Elector Frederick, whose political support he needed. Behind the scenes the Lord of the Church was actively guiding it all, protecting the Reformer’s life and causing the gospel to sound forth.

While Luther did not have to live as a fugitive when he finally returned to Wittenberg the following March, the edict did have an impact on Luther. He could not travel as freely as he might have previously, even within Germany, because there were many areas in which the Edict of Worms had been published and would be enforced.<sup>95</sup> Lull and Nelson argue that the edict not only limited his travel, but also placed an extraordinary strain on him for the next twenty-five years of his life, physically and emotionally, as he regularly had to wonder about his survival.<sup>96</sup> While Luther expressed great confidence in the Lord’s protecting hand, which allowed him to rest secure, he also recognized that following Christ meant carrying a cross. He was not shocked by the suffering he faced, since no servant is above his master. If they persecuted Christ, then they would persecute him, too (John 15:20). Christ’s disciples, Luther recognized, must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him (Mark 8:34). As the Spirit enabled, Luther embraced the cross because he knew what the Lord does through the suffering of his children: he forms theologians. He trains them to focus on the promises of God no matter what they see or feel.

### **Imitating Luther's faith**

A Christian can hardly hear the account of Luther at the Diet of Worms without thinking and praying, “Lord, work in me what you worked in your servant Martin Luther. Enable me to think as he thought, to believe as he believed, to

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89. Jensen, 87. This remains the charge against the teaching of righteousness through faith in Christ alone, without the works of the law. While some people will indeed consider the message of full and free forgiveness a license to sin, that does not mean we must therefore attach conditions to the gospel to preserve upright living.

90. Jensen, 89.

91. Jensen, 101.

92. Jensen, 95.

93. Jensen, 103.

94. Schilling, 192. Brecht mentions that Frederick requested “that he be exempted from serving Luther with the mandate against him.” Brecht, 474. Hendrix offers this rationale for the emperor’s action: “Charles had calculated that it was better to let Luther live in exile than to make him a heroic martyr whose death might convulse the nation.” Hendrix, 108.

95. As a result of the Edict of Worms, for example, Luther could not be in Augsburg for the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Charles V in 1530.

96. Lull and Nelson, 135–36.

confess as he confessed, and to serve as he served.” If we’re going to pray, we might as well pray big. The Lord loves it when his people so trust his love and power that they boldly ask for great blessings.<sup>97</sup>

*A heart captured by the gospel*

Here is a petition that suggests itself: “Lord, capture my heart with your word of full and free forgiveness in Christ.” Luther’s courageous stand at the Diet of Worms ultimately traces back to the Lord’s merciful work in Luther’s heart. In his days in the monastery, Luther lived in continual concern about his standing before God. Believing what he had been taught, that the righteous God demands righteousness from all who desire to live with him, Luther labored to manufacture a righteousness that would please God. His conscience plagued him because his sinfulness was always before him. Day after day he witnessed the sins that issued from his sinful nature. Even his best works, he realized, needed forgiveness.<sup>98</sup> He might be able to reduce the sins he would commit outwardly by exerting every ounce of his willpower to obey God’s commandments, but he couldn’t stop sinning against God. Despair settled upon Luther when he recognized that the righteousness he needed to stand before God was beyond his ability to produce.

But then the Lord broke through.<sup>99</sup> With the light of his unconditional gospel, the Lord dispelled the haze that had made it impossible for Luther to see the Lord as he truly is: as the one who loves the unworthy and welcomes the penitent with open arms. Through the gospel, he opened Luther’s heart to believe that the righteousness that counts before God is the righteousness God gives through faith in Christ. By a miracle of God’s grace, worked by the Spirit’s power, Luther trusted that the righteousness of Christ was his righteousness, that the Father delighted in him the way he delighted in his Son. The Lord captured Luther’s heart by his powerful, life-giving gospel. Freed from the foolish idea that he had to do something to get God’s attention or receive his favor, Luther experienced peace like never before. The burden had been lifted. He felt that “he had entered paradise itself through open gates.”<sup>100</sup> The Lord taught Luther to live by the promise of righteousness through faith instead of fixating on his obedience. Luther’s greatest desire, as one who had been freed by the gospel, was to be the Lord’s instrument in causing the promise to be proclaimed clearly. At the heart of his service, then, was the heart the Lord had captured by his gospel.

How do we ensure that the Lord captures our hearts by his gospel to the same extent he captured Luther’s heart? Few of us have experienced exactly what Luther did, with consciences so burdened with guilt and doubt that we despaired of being saved. We didn’t think of Jesus consistently as an angry judge ready to unleash his wrath on us because of our unrighteousness. Many of us have known God’s unconditional love in Christ from infancy. The one who made light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts. He led us to what we could never have arrived at on our own: a confidence that the righteousness of Christ is our entire righteousness before God, not based on our worthiness, but on his grace, through faith in Jesus. The Lord worked that miracle through his gospel.

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97. In the Large Catechism, as he explains the Second Petition, Luther teaches Christians to pray big in regard to spiritual blessings, because they know the power and love of the one to whom they pray: “Imagine if the richest and most powerful emperor commanded a poor beggar to ask for whatever he might desire and was prepared to give lavish, royal gifts, and the fool asked only for a dish of beggar’s broth. He would rightly be considered a rogue and scoundrel, who had made a mockery of the imperial majesty’s command and was unworthy to come into his presence. Just so, it is a great reproach and dishonor to God if we, to whom he offers and pledges so many inexpressible blessings, despise them or lack confidence that we shall receive them and scarcely venture to ask for a morsel of bread.” LC III:57 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 447.

98. Here’s one of the forty-one statements from Luther condemned in *Exsurge Domine*: “In every good work the just man sins.” Luther supported that teaching with Isaiah 64:6 (NIV), “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags,” and Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NIV84), “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.” The law teaches that a believer’s works are sins on their own because they are done by a sinner. The gospel teaches that a believer’s works are good and pleasing to God, a delight to him, because they are done by his child whom he has declared righteous through faith.

99. Nearly every Luther biography wrestles with the question, “When did Luther have his evangelical breakthrough? When did he finally grasp the gospel?” It’s an interesting question. At the same time, one wonders if the question might be turned around, to put the Lord and his mercy at the center of the story: “When did the Lord break through?” The Lord graciously opened Luther’s heart, by the gospel, to believe the gospel. He then graciously worked in and through Luther to cause the gospel of righteousness through faith in Christ to sound forth from his lips.

100. LW 34:33.

The Lord desires—for our benefit, not his—to expand his reign in our hearts. He continues to come to us through the gospel in the Scriptures, in the sacraments, and in the word of forgiveness we hear from called servants of the gospel and from our brothers and sisters in Christ. To all who aspire to take their stand against teachings that obscure the gospel, the Lord makes this promise: his living and active Word will not return to him empty. (Too often we think of that only as a promise about our proclamation of his Word. It's his promise about our listening, too.) The Spirit will work through the gospel to grant peace, increase faith, and empower service. That's why the apostle Paul invites us, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16 NIV). The apostle's choice of "richly" is instructive. The Lord desires that his people have abundant contact with the message of the Savior who lived and died for all. We are free to rest, at our Savior's invitation. We are free to spend time each day reading and reflecting on the Scriptures. As we do, we will see more clearly our sinfulness and our desperate need for a Savior. Better, the Lord will enable us to view Jesus with bigger eyes, even more astounded at his love for undeserving sinners. Hearts that are amazed by what God has done for them, and in which God lives by his Spirit, will be ready to stand on the Scriptures. They cannot do otherwise.

#### *A heart concerned for the gospel*

Luther's insistence on the *sola Scriptura* principle, that every teaching be established by the Scriptures alone, not by the councils of the church or the Roman pontiff, arose from a heart captured by the gospel. He loved the Scriptures and turned to them because they pointed consistently to Christ as the sinner's righteousness and life.<sup>101</sup> The Roman church, by its teachings, had pointed people away from Christ to their own righteousness. Luther's concern was not to preserve pure doctrine for pure doctrine's sake, but for the sake of preserving the gospel by which the Lord effects faith and gives life. Please do not misunderstand that. The Reformer was not a fundamentalist, focused only on a short list of teachings that he deemed critical to the Christian faith. The Reformer's commitment to pure teaching in every area shines through clearly in his writings. What drove that commitment, however, was his love for the gospel that sets people free from everlasting death. If people believed that the pope had the authority to teach something contrary to Scripture, then they would no longer concern themselves with what the Bible teaches about the righteousness of God received by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*). In other words, Luther insisted on *sola Scriptura* primarily because the Lord had broken through and convinced him of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. This is a place where we desire to imitate Luther's faith.

We desire to take our stand on the Scriptures. We desire to teach the Word of God in its truth and purity. And rightly so. We do well, though, to consider whether we are insisting on pure doctrine for pure doctrine's sake or for the sake of the gospel. For instance, when the unbelieving world around us contends that the Bible is filled with errors, we feel compelled to speak. We confess with intrepid hearts what the Bible says about itself: that it is God's own Word, given by inspiration, without any errors. His Word could hardly be anything but truth, we maintain, since God himself is truth. In the end, the argument simplified becomes this: "To deny that the Bible is inspired and inerrant is to break the First Commandment. You are defying what God has said." That is certainly true, but insisting on pure doctrine for pure doctrine's sake is ultimately a law-oriented approach. It's arguing about who's right and who's wrong. At that point we're not far from pride being the driver of our insistence on purity of doctrine.

With Luther, our ultimate concern is for the gospel. As evangelical Lutherans, we want the good news of righteousness through faith in Christ presented clearly and widely, for the glory of God as the one who loves sinners and for the benefit of human beings. When it comes to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, for example, it is good to keep in mind how we came to believe that the Bible is the very Word of God. The Spirit of God introduced Christ to us as the gift of the Father's love for sinners. By the message of righteousness through faith in Christ, the Spirit formed saving faith in our hearts. And now we believe what the Bible says about itself. Notice the order. Faith in Christ comes first, then the conviction that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. In short, we believe that the Bible is God's Word, without error, because the Scriptures bring Christ to us. Therefore, rather than trying to convince an unbeliever, as the first order of business, that the Bible is God's inerrant Word, we want to proclaim Christ to her. When the Spirit forms faith in her heart through the message of Christ, he will have opportunity to change her view of the Scriptures, too.

There's a lesson there, too, when it comes to visible Christian churches that speak at odds with the Scriptures. Our concern is the gospel, not pure doctrine for pure doctrine's sake. The goal isn't to prove that we are right or that we

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101. Robert Rosin, picking up on an illustration that Luther himself used, describes it this way: "Because he found Christ in the Scriptures rather than in the decrees of popes and councils, Luther held fast to those biblical texts. The Scriptures were the swaddling clothes that held Christ." Rosin, 64.

teach what the Bible teaches, but to preserve a place for the preaching of the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. For instance, there are Christian churches who affirm homosexual marriage as a God-pleasing way in which people attracted to others of the same gender may live in a relationship of love and trust. The confusion over sexuality within the visible church calls us to action. The first action is to pray for those who have been deceived by the devil's cunning. As we pray that the Lord would open their eyes to what he says in the Scriptures, we would rightly express our thanksgiving that the Lord graciously broke through and taught us the truth. That we know the truth about marriage is not because we are smarter or better than others, but only because the Lord is merciful. If it weren't for the Lord's grace, we would think and act at odds with everything God says.

After praying, by which we are reminded that we are merely instruments in the hands of the one who guides all things, we rightly take a stand. We need to confess what the Scriptures say, that marriage is for one man and one woman and that God's initial design for human sexuality still stands. Our goal in doing so is not primarily to ensure that people do the right thing and live the right way.<sup>102</sup> It's not to prove that we, unlike other church bodies, are faithful to the Scriptures and that we teach God's Word in its truth and purity. Nor do we take a stand to demonstrate that, unlike "those" churches that teach "those things," we put a priority on pleasing God, not human beings. Instead, we confess God's design for human sexuality for the sake of the gospel. When natural law is obliterated, then the gospel seems unnecessary. If people do not recognize that they are accountable to God or realize how often they have transgressed God's commands and how their sins reveal their depravity, then they will feel no need for the righteousness that God gives through faith in Christ. Once people learn how to dismiss natural law in one area of life, they become increasingly adept in dismissing it in other areas, too. And then the gospel seems superfluous to them. As we follow in the footsteps of the Reformer, we want to take a stand for the sake of the gospel. We want Christ to be magnified in people's hearts and that happens when the Spirit convicts people of sin and convinces them that the righteousness of Christ covers their sin. This is not to suggest that keeping the preaching of the gospel as our primary goal guarantees that people will never again accuse us of being unloving, narrow-minded, or homophobic. It may, however, help us from focusing on proving ourselves right.

#### *Willing to suffer for the gospel*

When it comes to dealing with persecution, Luther offers much to imitate. He certainly experienced significant persecution. The pope, who by his calling ought to have defended Luther and promoted the gospel, did the opposite. He declared Luther a heretic and commanded that all of Luther's writings be burned. The emperor declared Luther an outlaw, threatening to pursue and punish Luther for the crime of treason because of his divisive teaching. That persecution, however, did not surprise Luther or shake him to the core of his being. For this reason, first: he believed what the Scriptures said about the devil. He knew that the Christian's struggle is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12 NIV). This was not the stuff of science fiction for Luther, but his day-to-day reality. The devil and the evil angels are real and powerful. They desire to destroy God's new creation, his Church, and to silence the gospel by which the Lord builds his Church. Luther traced many of the challenges he faced to the devil, who was seeking to derail him from carrying out his calling as a gospel preacher.

The more the Scriptures govern our thinking, the more readily we see the devil at work persecuting the Church. Are we a bit hesitant to speak of persecution in those terms? Does it seem a bit "out there" to speak of evil beings that people cannot see? The Scriptures do not hesitate to speak of "spiritual forces of evil," and neither should we. When we are persecuted, we need to connect it to the spiritual battle in which we are engaged. This is serious business;

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102. While it is not our primary goal as the Church (either "gathered" as a body of believers or "scattered" in our individual situations and stations in life) to ensure that people submit to natural law and live upright lives, we can think of it as an ancillary task. Both individually and corporately (as congregations and a synod), we rightly work to help preserve order in our society, out of love for our neighbor and, additionally, so that we can continue to have the freedom to preach the gospel, again out of love for our neighbor. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, as the apostle Paul encourages us to pray for those in authority, that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives, he makes a connection between a civil society and the preaching of the good news that is the mission of the church. When the government does its God-given job of providing peace and safety, Christians can freely speak of the God who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. God's people can be part of the Lord's answer to their prayers for the welfare of society as, for instance, they help promote obedience to natural law regarding sexuality, by their personal example, their engagement in the community, and their support of marriage as God designed it. It's only when the gathered people of God (e.g., a congregation or church body) think of that as the church's primary responsibility, rather than an ancillary task, that it becomes detrimental.

life with God is at stake. However, while Luther was quick to recognize the devil's activity, the devil did not terrify him. He trusted the Lord's promise that Christ had defeated the devil, once and for all, in his rising from the dead.<sup>103</sup> Because Jesus lives, he reigns.<sup>104</sup> He rules over everything for the good of his Church, even over the devil's attempts to silence the preaching of the gospel through persecution. We imitate Luther's faith as we cling to the promise that our Savior has authority over the spiritual forces of evil. Jesus has crushed the devil's head. The victory is his. And since we have been baptized into Christ, the victory is ours, too.

Here's a second reason Luther was not surprised by the persecution he experienced: he knew what Jesus had said about a student not being above his teacher. Jesus himself, the perfect Son of God, faced persecution and rejection. His disciples will necessarily face the same. Luther was not a masochist. He did not enjoy the persecution he experienced for proclaiming the gospel that sets people free. What allowed him to remain steadfast was his Spirit-worked confidence in the Lord's promise in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11,12 NIV). Luther considered it an honor to suffer for the Savior's gospel the way the prophets and apostles had.<sup>105</sup> We imitate the faith of Luther when we think more about the promised reward awaiting us than the suffering we may experience for a time as we proclaim God's Word to the world. The heavenly reward the Savior will graciously give us on the Last Day will make any suffering we experienced here seem rather small in comparison. As the apostle Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18 NIV).<sup>106</sup>

Rather than complaining that people infringe on our "right" to proclaim God's Word by their insistence that we adhere to politically correct language, might we simply rejoice and carry on? The apostles did not complain about being flogged by the Sanhedrin for preaching the message of new life in Christ. Instead, they left "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" and "they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah" (Acts 5:41,42 NIV). The Lord's promise had captured their hearts and was ringing in their ears. With Paul, we can see the persecution we experience as something other than a burden unfairly foisted upon us: "For it has been *granted*<sup>107</sup> to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him" (Philippians 1:29 NIV). The language St. Paul employs is arresting. He describes suffering the same way he describes faith, as a gracious gift from God. With Luther and all those who have gone before us, we live by faith and not by sight. We bear the cross that comes as a necessary consequence of our connection to Christ,<sup>108</sup> seeing the troubles we experience not as a sign that God has forgotten us, but as indication that we are Christians. There is no Christianity without the cross, as Luther wrote in the Large Catechism: "For where God's Word is preached, accepted,

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103. One cannot help but think of Luther's great hymn on Psalm 46: "Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us, We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him."

104. *LW* 48:198, as referenced earlier. "But Christ lives, and we shall enter Worms in spite of all the gates of hell and the powers in the air." In a letter to Spalatin in December 1520, Luther wrote, "For He who saved the three men in the furnace of the Babylonian king still lives and rules." *LW* 48:189, emphasis mine.

105. *Luther's Correspondence*, 366, as previously referenced. "Yet I rejoice with my whole heart that for this best of causes I suffer evil, who am not worthy of being so tried."

106. In a sermon on Romans 8:18-22 for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, Luther summarizes the apostle's encouragement to endure suffering: "So Paul makes all earthly suffering infinitely small—a drop, a tiny spark, so to speak; but of yonder hoped-for glory he makes a boundless ocean, an illimitable flame." Martin Luther, *Luther's Epistle Sermons*, Volume 3, translated by John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis: The Luther Press, 1909), 99.

107. The verb translated "granted" has "grace" at its root. We can properly consider our suffering for the sake of the gospel as a gift of God's undeserved love, just as we view faith.

108. Luther, in the previously-mentioned sermon for the Fourth Sunday after the Trinity, wrote of the necessity of the cross for the Christian in these words: "Since Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, had to suffer before he could be glorified, we must be martyrs with him, with him be mocked by the world, despised, spit upon, crowned with thorns and put to death, before the inheritance will be ours. It cannot be otherwise." *Luther's Epistle Sermons*, 97.

or believed, and bears fruit, there the holy and precious cross will also not be far behind.”<sup>109</sup> Like Luther, we cling to the Savior’s promises. The Lord promises that we are blessed when we suffer for the gospel. He promises that the glory we will experience in the new heavens and the new earth will make any temporal suffering we endure for confessing the faith seem trivial.<sup>110</sup> He promises that he will use the crosses we must carry to purify our faith (1 Peter 1:6,7).

*The joyful obligation of confessing the gospel*

In Luther’s confessing of the faith we have an excellent example to follow. When von der Ecken asked Luther if he would affirm or retract what he written, the professor from Wittenberg requested time to think about his answer. He explained that he did not want to “assert less than the cause demands or more than accords with the truth.” In addition, he wanted to ensure that he would not “come under Christ’s judgment” by denying the Savior before the world.<sup>111</sup> Confessing the faith, Luther demonstrated, is important business that requires great care. The next day, after prayer and meditation, Luther did what a child of God does. He confessed. He believed, and therefore he spoke (2 Corinthians 4:13), for the glory of God and the benefit of others. The Word that had conquered his heart sounded forth from his lips. It’s true that he did not have opportunity at the Diet of Worms to explain what the Scriptures teach about the righteousness that matters before God, given the strictures placed on him. However, he did confess that he still believed what he had written about the way to life with God. The good news of righteousness through faith alone by grace alone was more important to him than his status in the church or the empire. Recanting the good news would have robbed God of his glory as the Savior of unworthy sinners and would have caused many to stumble.

Luther realized the gift he had been given by God, this understanding of righteousness received through faith in Christ. He felt an obligation to proclaim it to others. That obligation did not arise from the law, that is, from a demand God made of him if he wished to remain in God’s good graces. It came from the gospel. The Holy Spirit, in convincing Luther that life with God came as a gift, changed Luther’s view of those around him. Instead of using them as means to an end, as objects to be served primarily to gain something from God, he was free to spend his life in service to his neighbors, for their benefit, as God’s instrument to bless them.<sup>112</sup> Luther had been freed to serve. For him that meant proclaiming the good news of righteousness through faith in Christ to those who had been taught to produce their own righteousness. Through the gospel, Luther believed, the Lord would accomplish great things. In a letter to Spalatin in January 1521, Luther expressed his confidence in the Lord’s working through the Word: “I would not fight for the gospel with force and slaughter. The world is overcome by the Word, the Church is saved, and will even be reformed, by the Word, and Antichrist also will hereafter, as formerly, be restrained without violence by the Word.”<sup>113</sup> Luther trusted the Lord’s promises about his gospel, that it was “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16 NIV).

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109. LC III:65–66.

110. In a (second) sermon on Romans 8:18–22 for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, Luther wrote, “Doubtless in yonder life we shall reproach ourselves with the thought: ‘How foolish I was! I am unworthy to be called the child of God, for I esteemed myself all too highly on earth and placed too little value upon this surpassing glory and happiness. Were I still in the world and with the knowledge I have of the heavenly glory, I would, were it possible, suffer a thousand years of imprisonment, or endure illness, persecution or other misfortunes. Now I have proven true that all the sufferings of the world are nothing measured by the glory to be manifested in the children of God.’” *Luther’s Epistle Sermons*, 113.

111. *LW* 32:107.

112. Heiko Oberman expresses it this way: “Only when the crippling fear of not being saved and the anxious egotism of achieving one’s salvation have been overcome by faith does the welfare of the world come into view. The gift of justification releases man from his greed for rewards and enables the believer to be truly pious ‘for nothing’—not from fear of punishment and Hell but to the greater glory of God and ‘to the benefit of one’s neighbor.” Oberman, 206. Charles Arand and Joel Biermann point out that the medieval church’s teaching of righteousness by works “both undermined salvation and failed the neighbor. It failed the neighbor because it required that I instrumentalize or objectify my neighbor by using him in order to obtain my salvation.” Charles P. Arand and Joel Biermann, “Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?” *Concordia Journal* 33 (2007), 121.

113. *Luther’s Correspondence*, 442. In a sermon delivered in March 1522, soon after he returned to Wittenberg from his time at the Wartburg, Luther spoke about his confidence in the gospel’s power: “Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.” *LW* 51:77.

We have been given a special treasure in the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone. By the grace of God, we believe, teach, and confess that we do not need to participate in the acquisition of righteousness by our obedience to God's commands. From beginning to end, God does everything. It does not depend in even the smallest way on us: on our asking Jesus into our heart or our putting aside sin or our leading a new life. We are beggars. We receive what the Lord freely gives through Spirit-worked faith. Most in our world do not know the unconditional gospel. We do, because of God's grace. It is our joyful obligation to confess the righteousness of faith in Jesus to those around us, for their benefit, that they may join us in praising the God who loves undeserving sinners and rescued them in Christ. Christ's love for us, and for all, compels us. We imitate Luther's faith when we trust the Lord's promise to work through his gospel. Whenever the gospel is proclaimed, the Lord sends his Holy Spirit, "who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel."<sup>114</sup> The Lord does not ask us for results; he asks only that we be faithful with the life-giving gospel he has planted in our hearts and placed in our mouths.

*Confessing the gospel with boldness and humility*

Luther confessed boldly, often with strong language. On occasion, he wrote and spoke too strongly. He granted as much when he was differentiating between the types of books he had written. As he considered what he had written against some so-called distinguished people who supported Rome's false teaching, he admitted, "Against these I confess that I have been more violent than my religion or profession demands."<sup>115</sup> While he would not retract the content of the books, because they spoke for the righteousness of faith and against the lies of the Roman church, he recognized that he should have written in a kinder, gentler way. As he stood before the diet on April 18, he spoke humbly and respectfully. He addressed those gathered with deference: "Most serene emperor, most illustrious princes, most clement lords."<sup>116</sup> Acknowledging that he was no expert in courtly customs, Luther asked them to pardon his breaches of etiquette. His goal was to let God's Word have center stage, not him and his manner of expression. His confidence was that the gospel had power to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). There was no need for him to resort to human techniques to compel people to believe.

The apostle Peter encourages us, as we confess why we are certain that we will live with God in the home of righteousness, to do so "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). It's entirely too easy to speak with contempt about (and to) those who believe and teach contrary to Scripture. After all, they are dishonoring God by their false teaching. They are depriving people of the comfort the Lord desires them to have and therefore do not deserve our respect. That, however, is to have a memory like a sieve. It's to forget how we came to know the gospel. That we know the truth isn't because we were nobler than others, more likely to listen humbly to what God says in his Word. We know the gospel only because God is gracious. We cannot look down on others for their ignorance because we would be right there with them, if not for the grace of God.

One wonders if the oft-used expression, "We teach the Word of God in its truth and purity," might be a bit boastful. If the expression is used, it ought to be to confess our amazement at the grace God has shown us, that he has enabled us to teach the Scriptures properly. Robert Rosin encourages Lutherans to be mindful of the way they confess the truths of Scripture: "We confess not to hear ourselves talk or to pat ourselves on the back for being guardians of the truth even as we drive people away with our self-congratulatory attitudes or with the way we go about trying to teach and witness to that truth."<sup>117</sup> Our goal in proclaiming the truth is not to prove that we are right and worthy of honor as "defenders of orthodoxy," but to be the Lord's instruments in reaching people with the gospel. The cause is the Lord's, as Luther prayed the night before his second appearance. We want people to see Jesus, not us. As he addressed the illustrious lordships gathered in Worms, Luther said that in everything he had taught and written, he "had in view only the glory of God and the sound instruction of Christ's faithful."<sup>118</sup> Because that is our goal, too, we strive to confess our faith humbly.

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114. AC V, 3.

115. LW 32:111.

116. LW 32:109.

117. Rosin, 73.

118. LW 32:109.

### *Confessing the truth that divides*

Unfortunately, many will reject the truths of Scripture. They will resist the Spirit's work in their hearts and refuse to submit to what God says in his Word, no matter how gently we confess. That was the case as Luther confessed the truth. The leaders of the Roman church dismissed the gospel's teaching of righteousness through faith alone. They accused Luther of following the path of the heretics, who, "inspired only by their own sense of ambition, and for the sake of popular acclaim . . . twist and adulterate the Scriptures."<sup>119</sup> By his teaching, Pope Leo charged, Luther not only misled people but also introduced "the evil of schism into the Church of God."<sup>120</sup> Since division resulted from Luther's teaching, the argument went, his teaching was therefore false and must be condemned. That's not at all the way Luther saw it from Scripture. Luther went so far as to rejoice in the dissension that had arisen because of the Word of God, seeing it as a fulfillment of what Jesus had said, that he had come not to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34). Preserving peace in the church at the expense of the truth of the gospel, Luther said, would lead to "an intolerable deluge of evils"<sup>121</sup> as a judgment from God.

In his High Priestly Prayer Jesus prayed for all who would believe in him through the apostles' preaching: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21 NIV). That is our prayer, too. We want all Christians to be united in a common confession. For that reason, we will continue to confess to others what God teaches in his Word, so that there might be unity. Sitting in the corner and refusing to engage others in conversation does not fit with the calling we have received. At the same time, we cannot, for the sake of the noble goal of outward unity in the church, set aside some of the teachings of the Scriptures that we may deem peripheral.<sup>122</sup> While we labor for unity in doctrine, we expect that there will be division because "many false prophets will arise and lead many astray" (Matthew 24:11 NIV) and because people will "gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3 NIV).<sup>123</sup> We know the devil's ability to deceive people. That our attempts to confess may not be met with success should neither dissuade us from the effort nor surprise us. Instead we believe the Lord's promise and look forward to the Day of Jesus' return, when there will be complete unity.

### **Here we stand**

As we consider what's happening in the visible church today, we recognize that there is significant work to be done to "conserve and extend the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church."<sup>124</sup> It seems that we need another Martin Luther, whose heart has been captured by the gospel and is willing to risk even life itself to preserve it. We need another Martin Luther, who will take his stand on the truth of God's Word and confess the faith boldly. Who's it going to be? You? The Lord does not want you to be Martin Luther. He wants you to be you, in your setting and context. His design is that you, trusting his promises, will use the gifts he chose for you and take advantage of the opportunities he provides to confess the truth of righteousness through faith in Christ. Imitate Luther's faith, his lively confidence in the promises of God. Trust that the Lord will be the Lord. He will give you strength to confess his gospel, for his glory and the blessing of others.

Here, by the grace of God, we stand. We cannot do otherwise. God help us. Amen.

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119. *Exsurge Domine*.

120. *Decet Romanum Pontificem*, preamble.

121. *LW* 32:111.

122. Lutheran theologians have distinguished between fundamental articles of faith, which everyone must know and believe to be saved, and nonfundamental articles of faith, which could be unknown or denied without harm to salvation. However, as Adolf Hoenecke aptly says, we are not free to dismiss even a nonfundamental teaching as unimportant: "It is certain from Scripture that every doctrine which God presents in Scripture binds us to receive it in faith and that every part of Scripture is an article of faith." Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Volume 1, translated by James Langebartels and Heinrich Vogel (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 513.

123. Typically, as we think about teachers who give their hearers what their itching ears want to hear, we think about those who subtract from Scripture, to make it easier for their hearers. There are also false teachers who add to the Bible, demanding from people what God has not demanded. Some itching ears, it turns out, want something more demanding than righteousness that comes as a gift through faith in Christ. They desire something that agrees with the sinful nature's view that life with God needs to be earned by the performance of impressive works.

124. WELS Constitution, Article IV. Are there bonus points for quoting from the synod's constitution at a synod convention?



# Closing service sermon: "We confess Christ"

July 28, 2021

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Rev. Charles Westra

Text: Matthew 10:32-39

"Well, I won't back down. No, I won't back down. You can stand me up at the gates of hell but I won't back down. I will keep this world from dragging me down . . . gonna stand my ground." After a study of the text, I went in search of a theme for this sermon, and these words struck me. The lyrics of the song by 20th century philosopher, Tom Petty, seem appropriate for our time and place. A quick bit of research, though, revealed that he did not have the gospel or the church anywhere in mind when he wrote the song, so I moved on. Luther, however did have both the gospel and the church in mind when he spoke at the Diet of Worms in 1521. "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures . . . Here I stand. May God help me. Amen."

We have stood on this foundation. We declare it still today. Go ahead, back us up to the gates of hell. World, give us your best shot. We will not back down. We stand upon the revealed word of God, preserved for us. The gospel message of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, lives and breathes at the center and heart of those Scriptures. With that gospel in mind, I suggest another theme for our meditation and the closing of our convention. WE CONFESS CHRIST. We confess Christ in the face of opposition. We confess Christ with complete confidence.

You know the general background of this gospel lesson. Jesus had called his disciples to follow him. I might be completely off base here but that doesn't really seem to be the hard part. They were in the presence of Jesus. He did the talking. They were in the presence of his empowering words. He took care of their spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. They looked on as Jesus established his power over nature, over sickness and over hunger. What could be better than hanging out with Jesus?

But now came the harder part. Jesus was sending them out into the world. They are to take his gospel message and proclaim it from person to person, from city to city and from region to region. Jesus didn't mince any words. He didn't tell them that it would be easy. He told them that he was sending them out as sheep among wolves. That picture doesn't give me many warm fuzzy feelings. A sheep without its shepherd in the presence of wolves doesn't stand a chance. They will be torn to pieces and devoured for a meal. The work of gospel proclamation would not be easy. There would be opposition to that message. But the disciples had been sent from the safety net of the church into the world to proclaim the gospel. They were to confess Christ.

Jesus told his disciples that he had come to bring a sword. They faced that daily in their work in proclaiming the Christ. There was animosity and even hostility. They faced persecution, danger, and even death as they carried the message of life to a world that was dying.

We are Jesus' disciples. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel message of a crucified and risen Savior beats in our hearts and lives. We are followers of our Savior. That is the easy part. He has created a new heart in each of us. He has given us life in him. He comforts the troubled heart and empowers the weak heart. And he sends us out with his message of life. He sends us into a world that is not always receptive. He sends us as sheep among wolves. He sends us out to confess him. We confess Christ.

There will be opposition to this message. This should not surprise us. The lambs among wolves should have been plenty warning. There is more. In 2 Corinthians 2 God inspired Paul to write that God is spreading the fragrance of life through us, those who confess Christ. To some, we are the fragrance of life. They love the message of life in Jesus through the forgiveness of their sins. To others, however, we are the stench of death. They want nothing to do with that message and often, they don't want anything to do with those who are sharing that message.

If you have done any amount of outreach work in your congregation or have worked at sharing your faith with those who don't confess Christ, you know that this is true. You have seen the looks of disdain and have probably heard

words of hostility toward any attempt to share Christ. I have my own. At 18 years old, I attempted to share simple law and gospel with peers at the death of one of our friends. I was abruptly told to keep my personal crap to myself in this time of sorrow. I was out canvassing a week ago in a subdivision 2 miles from our church. I approached the front door and a man on his lawn tractor glared at me and pointed at me and then at the street. His reaction was unfriendly at best and threatening at worst. There was hostility in his eyes and in his mannerisms. While that is not the norm in our canvassing efforts, I was not surprised. To some, we are the fragrance of life. To others, we are the stench of death.

It should not shock us if governments here and around the world do not seem overly concerned about supporting churches and their work. We should not be surprised when our efforts to take the gospel to our communities is met with resistance and raw emotions. That opposition might well even arise in our own homes and families. Jesus speaks clearly. The gospel message produces strong responses. Those who believe are in a love affair with that message. Those who don't believe are in a hate affair with that message. It will be polarizing. It will be divisive. There will be strong emotions and convictions. But we cannot stop. We cannot back down. We confess Christ. When it is easy and when it is hard, the church speaks the message of the Christ.

I wish that the opposition to that gospel only came from outside of me, of us. But I also find opposition within me, that is in my flesh. The good that I want to do, I have not always done. There have been times when I have been speaking to a person that doesn't have a church and I know exactly what they need to hear. I know that I need to jolt them with God's law so that I might bring them the comfort of God's gospel. But, there have been times that I have been worn down by the rejection and weary of the confrontation and I just don't want to do it.

There have been times when speaking to friends that I have not really wanted to confess Christ clearly. Have you ever had that conversation with God? I really like this person, Lord. I would not mind being their friend. We all need friends. I know that if I tell them the truth and share you clearly that it could jeopardize our friendship. I don't want to do that. Do I have to?

I have not faced it in my immediate family, but I know that some of you have. I have heard the conversations. If I speak too forcefully to my children, siblings, parents . . . they won't talk to me. They will cut me off from their lives. I cannot do that. I don't want to do that. The words of Jesus ring out with stinging clarity. Anyone who loves father and mother, son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Ouch. It leads to a difficult question. Have I confessed Christ clearly? Have I ever failed? Have you failed? Do we fail as a church?

The very question drives me/us back to Christ. We flee to the cross with nothing to bring but our own sin. And there we find exactly what we need. We find a Savior. In that Savior we find payment for our sin and peace with God. In Christ we find confidence.

In him we are restored. Every weak and sinful moment is erased from our accounts. All the times that I have loved people and things more than Christ and his message are washed in his precious blood. Every time that my actions or my words denied Christ has been blotted from God's memory and removed from his book. Even the times that I failed to clearly confess Christ when it seemed too hard or at the wrong time have been covered in the atoning sacrifice of my Savior. That is the message of the Christ. That is our message and comfort.

I once heard the statement that God was going to be angry with us on judgment day if we didn't get our act together and become more aggressive in sharing his gospel with the world around us. Make no mistake. God wants us in heaven. God wants all to be saved. He wants us to confess Christ clearly in our world so that all may hear that life giving message. But I can say with certainty that God will not be angry with me or with you on judgment day. Christ has set aside that wrath of God against sinners like us. We are God's dearly loved children. That is the gospel. That is the message of the Christ.

That message, the gospel, frees us and empowers us. The Savior who has given us life here to the fullest and life for eternity sends us in his name to confess him. It is who we are and it is what we do. We confess Christ.

We confess Christ as we worship together. We answer our Savior's call and we stand together and confess his name to each other and to all as we gather as the visible church gathered around the word and sacraments. Children and adults approach the font and we confess Christ as we unleash the power of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts and lives. We confess Christ as we approach the Lord's table to receive his body and blood for the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that God's wrath will never fall upon us.

We confess Christ as we prioritize our resources, both as individuals and as a congregation. We bring our first fruits in response to the gospel so that the gospel might be proclaimed in our churches, in our communities and throughout the world. We confess Christ clearly as we send missionaries and money to every tribe, language, people, and nation. Rejoice in our efforts. Pray for those who are going in our name so that more and more might hear the name of Jesus Christ and that they might find rest and peace in him.

We confess Christ as we seek to take the gospel to more than 40 countries around the world. We confess Christ as we seek to open 100 new mission congregations in the next decade. We are making a statement. Gospel outreach is our mission. We have been won for Christ so that we might proclaim Christ to as many as possible. It is who we are. We confess Christ.

And we do this all with confidence because we know how it all ends. Jesus simply states that all who confess him here, he will confess before his Father in heaven. On that day, the day of the last reckoning, we will stand before our God. The books will be opened, and a verdict will be rendered. And on that day, the Christ will confess us. That one is mine. He/she believed. They are washed in my blood. They belong to us and they will live in our presence for eternity.

Until then, we live and labor here. We do what the church does by faith. We don't back down. We stand firm on the Scriptures. We confess Christ. God grant us his strength and blessing. Amen.