



**WELS**  
Christ's Love, Our Calling.

## 2020 Report to the Twelve Districts **WELS Commission on Discipleship**

[cad.welsrc.net](http://cad.welsrc.net)

[yfm.welsrc.net](http://yfm.welsrc.net)

### **Our Calling**

WELS Commission on Discipleship exists to strengthen the connection of God's people to Christ and to one another at every stage of life. To that end, our mission is "to provide resources, encouragement, and training to assist congregations in their ongoing walk of faith." Because that walk of faith spans the totality of life, our calling encompasses ministry to all members of the Christian family in their unique callings: men and women, young children, teens, college-age and young adults, singles, parents, married couples, etc.

### **Our Current Situation**

#### **WELS Family Devotions**

Originally slated to begin Advent 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought families together in their homes like never before. WELS Commission on Discipleship responded by moving up the start of this devotional resource to Easter 2020. Developed intentionally for the entire family, each 3-4-minute devotion coincides with a Scripture lesson from the previous Sunday, is available in print and podcast, includes age-appropriate questions



to engage greater discussion with children, and closes with a prayer and hymn verse. The devotions are posted every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at [wels.net/serving-you/devotions/family-devotions](http://wels.net/serving-you/devotions/family-devotions) as well as on the WELS Facebook page. Congregations are encouraged to share with their church families, or to subscribe at [wels.net/subscribe](http://wels.net/subscribe).

#### **WELCOME HOME: Elder-Training Resources**

As part of Congregational Services *Welcome Home* initiative, the Commission on Discipleship developed an online, video-based elder training series with accompanying guide sheets and devotionals. Together, they are meant:

- To give a step-by-step approach for congregations to build and sustain a loving ministry to members who are drifting in faith. And,
- To encourage called workers and elders as they work together joyfully and face this challenging ministry with renewed energy.



### **10 for 10**

In mid-2019, this gospel-centered stewardship emphasis became available for congregations. The first 10 focuses on a better understanding of the biblical practice of tithing. The second 10 encourages God's people to put a good giving habit into practice for a period of ten weeks. Online resources include a promotional package, an adaptable congregational timeline, a three Sunday

worship emphasis with in-service Bible studies, accompanying power-points, bulletin/newsletter inserts, and ten 3-4-minute videos for continued encouragement.

Because the rollout of *Welcome Home* and *10 for 10* were in close proximity, churches may desire to implement the initiatives over a period of time that best works for their ministry. Therefore, these initiatives continue to be available at [welscongregationalservices.net](http://welscongregationalservices.net).

### **Kids Connection**

The goal of *Kids Connection* is to “connect kids to Christ and children around the world.” Now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year, this children’s monthly video is well-suited for use in Sunday School, youth programs, and elementary schools. For easier subscription, it is available in a bundle package with its parent video, *WELS Connection*. A downloadable version is also available. Subscribe at [online.nph.net/subscriptions/periodicals/kids-connection.html](http://online.nph.net/subscriptions/periodicals/kids-connection.html).

## **A Look Ahead**

### **Women’s Ministry**

As part of WELS Commission on Discipleship, Women’s Ministry provides resources to assist congregations in encouraging women in service within their churches. Devotions, Bible studies, Advent by Candlelight services, and ministry ideas can be found at [wm.welsrc.net](http://wm.welsrc.net). Women’s Ministry is currently developing:

- An online module for teaching women how to teach (other women) what is good. It will serve as guidance to better help men and women work together in ministry and for the advancement of God’s kingdom.
- *Create a Conversation* – devotions and discussion questions from women based on various parts of Luther’s Catechism. This is intended to be a digital project.

### **Youth Ministry Resources**

When COVID-19 forced the summer cancellation of the WELS International Youth Rally scheduled at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, the Commission on Discipleship needed to pivot from a ministry event attended by over 2,000 teens and youth chaperones from over 300 churches to creating a menu of online youth ministry resources for synodwide use. Resources will include multiple youth Bible studies and topics as well as training for youth leaders (“How to Keep Youth Ministry Simple”).

Youth ministries are encouraged to adopt “Vision 2020: See Christ Clearly. Serve Christ Boldly” as their teen ministry theme this fall. The release of these online resources is set for July 2020.

### **Marriage Enrichment Resources**

Congregational revitalization requires healthy families. Healthy families need healthy marriages. WELS Discipleship will soon be offering the following array of resources:

- WELS Marriage Refresher – In 2019, a WELS Discipleship task force revealed that overall impact of the longstanding, well-received and presented marriage weekend retreats has been limited in its overall reach to WELS marriages for a variety of reasons: geographical, financial, time commitment, etc. To broaden the target audience of WELS couples, an “entry-level” marriage refresher event is being developed to complement the present “platinum-level” model. Beginning the first quarter of 2021, it will:
  - Shorten a couple’s time commitment to a Friday evening through Saturday afternoon) and make optional overnight lodging.
  - Reduce the financial commitment from approx. \$450 to \$175 per couple.
  - Identify “Top 50” locations making the marriage event locally accessible to 75% of WELS marriages.
- Online marriage-based, Bible study videos – With short video introductions and accompanying guide sheets for couples to engage in meaningful discussion, this resource can flex between a target audience of individual couples or small group settings at the congregational level. The first set of three available this fall are:
  - Lesson 1 – Love that “Never Fails”
  - Lesson 2 – See Your Spouse (& Be Seen)
  - Lesson 3 – Establishing Priorities
- *Marriage Moments* – Beginning September 2020, this two-minute long weekly video will focus on a single marriage thought as a source of encouragement and inspiration for spouses to focus on during the week. Couples can subscribe for a link that will be emailed weekly on Monday mornings. WELS Discipleship also envisions “Marriage Moments” as a congregational tool in Bible study hour and pre-marriage or marriage counseling with a couple of accompanying discussion questions.

### **2021 Congregational Stewardship Initiative**

Development has begun on a new package of stewardship resources entitled, *Generous Living*. While the recent *10 for 10* focuses on the principles of Biblical giving and follow-up that allows for good giving habits to get started and rooted, *Generous Living* will help the Christian to thrive by viewing the totality of life being a disciple—living for others, hospitality, and what it means to live shrewdly. Accompanying resources will include a four-Sunday worship emphasis, accompanying Bible studies, devotions, and suggestions for financial counseling to personally assist members.

### **Sunday School Task Force**

It’s no secret that Sunday School attendance has dropped from 41,000 in 1997 to 17,000 in 2019. Part of the reason is demographics; i.e. WELS has fewer members in that demographic.

However, there seem to be other issues. This summer, the Commission on Discipleship will form a task force to identify the underlying reasons for the decline in Sunday School ministry and offer tactical recommendations for this youth discipleship effort before moving forward. The report and recommendations will be available in early 2021.

### **Online Confirmation Class Resources**

COVID-19 forced churches to adapt catechetical classes to online learning. There is a thirst to find class materials that reflect a variety of learning ways as well as various degrees of pastor and parent partnership in spiritual growth, such as:

- a family-driven model,
- a pastor-family partnership model,
- a flipped-classroom model.
- Online, video-based model.

WELS Commission on Discipleship will post samples of these teaching approaches with instructions so that called worker and congregational leaders can determine what is best for their ministry situation. These resources will be made available on the WELS Congregational Services website this summer.

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, director  
Rev. John Boggs, chairman  
Rev. Gary Pufahl, vice-chair  
Rev. Aaron Publitz  
Rev. Andy Schwartz  
Rev. Jon Bergemann  
Rev. Paul Schupmann

#### *Advisory:*

Prof. Thomas Kock,  
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Mr. Mark Stein,  
Martin Luther College

Mr. Jeremy Bakken,  
Northwestern Publishing House

