

## **Our calling**

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

MCG assists the COP with their responsibility to fund the Lord’s work through our synod. This funding is provided through Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) as well as direct gifts to WELS from individuals, groups, and foundations.

- In the area of CMO, our efforts are focused on supplying congregations with encouraging information on ministry opportunities and needs as they prayerfully set their annual commitments. We also send them quarterly reports of their offerings to WELS.
- In the area of direct gifts from individuals, we regularly mail and e-mail appeals that explain our gospel work and encourage support of synodical ministries. We also provide information to donors about Christian estate planning <https://foundation.welsrc.net/download-foundation/estate-planning-guide/> and other planned giving options <https://wels.net/giving/wels-foundation/> that allow them to give in a way that is beneficial for them, their families, and the ministries close to their hearts. Also, MCG supports Christian giving counselors (13.6 full time equivalents as of March 1—four counselors are semi-retired and twelve are full-time) across all 12 districts of WELS to assist God’s people with gifts of any kind. Their services are free and confidential.
- Gifts from foundations often result from consultation between the MCG director, other synod leaders, and the foundations regarding funding of new ideas and enhancements to ministry.

## **Our current situation**

*Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO)* <https://mccg.welsrc.net/cmo/>

MCG coordinates with Communication Services to regularly share CMO updates and ministry impact through WELS media. Each year MCG oversees the process of collecting congregational offering subscriptions beginning in late summer and lasting through the first Friday of February. This involves mailed and e-mailed communications as well as direct follow-up coordinated with our MCG district chairmen. We are happy to report another record-setting 99 percent participation rate in the subscription setting process for 2020 like we had for 2019 (the average participation rate over the past ten years has been 96 percent).

In addition to the typical mailed and e-mailed information, we work with Communication Services to help the COP produce videos illustrating how God’s work through WELS touches each district. We praise our Lord and thank our congregations for their steady offerings year after year, which are a generous response to Christ’s love. (For details on CMO pledged and received in the 19-21 biennium, see the financial sections of this *Report to the Twelve Districts*.)

*Christian giving counselors* <https://wels.net/giving/ministry-of-christian->

[giving/christiangivingcounselordirectory/](#)

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

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

*Special Offerings* <https://community.wels.net/>

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

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

From July 2019 through June 2021, MCG is partnering with Martin Luther College to present *Equipping Christian Witnesses* (ECW) to both congregations and individuals. Through the first seven months of the campaign, our MCG/MLC team has conducted 1,775 meaningful donor visits and is encouraging churches in all twelve districts to consider holding an ECW Sunday in 2020. Thanks to our Savior, we've already received gifts, donor advised funds distributions, pledges, and church commitments totaling over \$1.42 million for this synodwide initiative that focuses on recruitment of future ministerial education students, tuition assistance, and facilities. Congregations can learn how they may participate in the campaign by going to [mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign](http://mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign), clicking on the ECW Campaign Toolbox, and downloading the congregational guidelines or ECW Sunday materials.

*Appeals* <https://wels.net/giving/ministry-of-christian-giving/support-our-ministries/>

MCG works closely with our WELS areas of ministry and ministerial education schools to send about 14 mailed appeals as well as 4-12 e-appeals each year. Each of the synod's four main areas of ministry receives two of the annual mailed appeal slots and several e-appeals, while other initiatives (e.g., Commission on Inter-Church Relations, Christian Aid and Relief, Mission and Ministry, and WELS endowments) receive one mailed appeal slot per year. One or two of the annual appeals encourage specialized gifts such as a charitable gift annuity or qualified charitable distributions from an IRA. The appeals coordinate with other WELS media including *WELS Connection*, *Forward in Christ*, WELS' websites, and the *Together* e-newsletter. Appeals have produced an average net income of \$953,513 per year since fiscal year 2010.

*WELS endowment funds* <https://wels.net/giving/ministry-of-christian-giving/give-a-gift/welsendowment-funds/>

MCG is working toward building up the WELS endowment funds for the benefit of ministerial education and home/joint/world missions. As of early 2020 the WELS endowments had \$27.5 million in immediate gifts with another \$64.8 million expected from deferred gifts arranged by donors working with Christian giving counselors. The 2019 distribution from these endowments totaled \$917,161, including \$508,123 to Missions and \$409,038 to Ministerial Education.

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

*Encouragement of planned gifts* <https://mcg.welsrc.net/download-mcg/congregational-planned-giving-program/>

MCG revised and mailed a new congregational planned giving manual to churches in 2019. This publication helps congregations jump-start a program of promoting planned giving opportunities to members. It also provides guidance on setting up a planned giving committee as well as establishing and administering an endowment fund. Our Christian giving counselors are available to introduce the planned giving program to congregational leaders.

In recent years qualified charitable distributions from IRAs have become a popular way for anyone 70.5 or older to support ministry. These distributions are free from federal and potentially state income tax, so donors can direct distributions to their church, synod, or other WELS ministry to save on taxes, then use the cash they would have given for other needs. MCG is working with WELS Foundation to inform donors and churches of this opportunity and to provide resources to assist at [wels.net/qcd](https://wels.net/qcd).

*Reviews of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving*

At the suggestion of the WELS Foundation Board and through their generous financial support approved by the Conference of Presidents and Synodical Council, WELS Ministry of Christian Giving hired Sharpe Group in late 2017 to assess our planned giving communication efforts and create a five-year planned giving communication plan to enhance our service to WELS donors and the long-term financial stability

of WELS areas of ministry and WELS-affiliated ministries. Goals of the planned giving communication program include increasing the number of known commitments to WELS ministry as well as seeing a growth in the number of matured (i.e., received) gifts in the coming years. Sharpe reviewed our program and concluded we are doing many things well. They also had some recommendations to enhance our planned giving communications. We have added available data to our database to help us better serve our constituents. We also began a planned giving newsletter, *Grace of Giving*, in 2019 to share ministry updates and planned giving options. As of the time of this writing, other suggested actions steps from Sharpe Group (including hiring an additional office staff member to assist with the work) are on hold pending the Bentz Whaley Flessner review (next paragraph).

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

#### *Development counsel to other organizations*

We annually offer development training to Christian giving counselors, ministerial education mission advancement staff, home/joint/world missions administrators and anyone serving a WELS/ELS-affiliated ministry in development. One goal of such training is to encourage a consistent approach to God’s people that’s Christ-centered and donor-sensitive, and that minimizes potential donor fatigue and the impression that we’re competitors or trying to “get” something from our fellow Christians. Eighteen people participated in our January 2020 training.

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

#### *Statistical Report <https://mcg.welsrc.net/stats/>*

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

## **A look ahead**

Following are our goals and plans for 2020 and beyond:

- We will work with Communication Services and the Conference of Presidents to communicate with congregations regarding 2021 CMO subscription setting, including production of a special video to encourage CMO.
- We plan to continue encouraging gifts to WELS through our annual appeal program and counselor visits and presentations.
- MCG will work with the COP to map out our future steps (e.g., goals, procedures, office and field staff levels, etc.) in response to the Bentz Whaley Flessner review.
- Our next WELS Christian Giving Training for WELS/ELS advancement personnel will take place Jan. 11-15, 2021. Contact us to register or receive more information (800-827-5482 or [mcg@wels.net](mailto:mcg@wels.net)).

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

*Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, reporter*