

Your gifts,
God's blessings

An annual report to our members

Message from the President

FRONT COVER: The children's choir of the National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts. For more on the conference, see p. 15. Photo courtesy of Fresh Frame Photography.

NOTE: Some information in this report is compiled from communications previously published. Special thanks for reprint permission from Martin Luther College's *InFocus* and *KnightWatch Weekly*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's *Preach the Gospel*, WELS Missions' *Faces of Faith*, and *Forward in Christ* magazine.



President Schroeder served as the presiding minister of the closing worship service of the **National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts** on Aug. 2, 2024.

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22,23).

God’s faithfulness is as steadfast for us as a synod as it is for us as individuals. This annual report reviews some of the ways that God has displayed his faithfulness and blessed our work together during the past year.

The blessings begin close to home, as well-trained pastors, teachers, and staff ministers serve our congregations with God’s Word. Those workers are gifts of God and are able to serve us because God himself has sent these workers into his harvest field.

We look back on how God blesses our congregations as they gather around Word and sacrament and as their members reach out into their communities with the good news of our Savior and with Christian love and compassion for those in need.

Looking a little farther beyond our own congregations, we see how God continues to bless our 100 Missions in 10 Years effort, with more new home missions established and other existing ministries enhanced to serve more people with the gospel.

Then we look to see what God has been doing to bring his saving message to people around the world. God is giving us numerous new opportunities to reach the

lost in places like Tanzania, Australia, Argentina, the United Kingdom, and the Navajo Nation. He’s not only giving us the opportunities, but he is also providing the manpower and opening the hearts of WELS people to support those efforts with their thank-offerings.

God is faithful.

He proved it every day during the past year, and he will continue to prove it in the year to come. May we continue to be motivated by his great love to serve him together faithfully.

Mark Schroeder

REV. MARK SCHROEDER
WELS President



PICTURED LEFT: In January 2024, WELS President Mark Schroeder traveled to Uganda to celebrate the declaration of fellowship between WELS and the **Obadiah Lutheran Synod**. Delegates to the 2023 WELS convention voted to declare fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in July 2023. During President Schroeder’s visit to Uganda, the Obadiah Lutheran Synod hosted a worship service and fellowship event that was attended by more than 1,000 guests. WELS hosted the Obadiah Lutheran Synod’s president, Makisimu Musa (pictured here with his family and President Schroeder), in fall 2023.





Mark Paustian, professor at Martin Luther College, with preseminary student Luke Wegner

Called to prepare

WELS ministerial education

The purpose of WELS' ministerial education program is the preparation of candidates for the public ministry of the gospel. Pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and missionaries are prepared to proclaim Christ's love in the congregations, schools, and mission fields of our fellowship. WELS supports ministerial education on three levels at four schools—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Pictured above is preseminary student Luke Wegner with Mark Paustian, professor at Martin Luther College. Paustian teaches Advanced Christian Rhetoric. Wegner explains that this class's first goal is to help students write a chapel message and its second goal is to introduce students to Christian apologetics.

Wegner appreciated the class and explains, "When you're preparing to write your chapel, you don't just sit down and write about the first thing that comes to mind. Prof. Paustian always reminded us to 'marry the text,' which really means

to fall in love with the section of Scripture that you get to preach about. You want to know it so well and so intimately. You want to ask questions about the text and find answers. Then, once you have prayed a lot about it and have filled up your mind with so many ideas, you want to think them through so that they are clear and organized as thoughts. Then, after the lengthy brainstorming process, the actual writing process is so much easier because, at that point, you have already thought so much about it that you have a pretty clear idea of what you want to say.

"[Advanced Christian Rhetoric] was wonderful because you and your whole class are each preparing your own unique chapel message on a different section of Scripture. So, while you're all in the process of learning how to write and writing your chapel, you get to meet, brainstorm, share ideas, and even practice your chapel in front of each other, getting feedback on what was good and what to improve. **This was such a valuable experience for me.** 'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another' (Proverbs 27:17)."



One hundred seventy-five students graduated from MLC in May 2024.

Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn.:

- prepares men for pastoral training at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary;
- prepares men and women for service as teachers and staff ministers in the synod’s churches, schools, and other institutions;
- prepares men and women for other church ministries, both full- and part-time, responding to the needs of WELS;
- prepares international students for ministry in partnership with WELS mission fields; and
- provides programs of continuing education that meet the ministerial needs of WELS.

DID YOU KNOW?

MLC was ranked the **#1 Best College for Education** in Minnesota by niche.com.

614  UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN 2024–25




INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Yi Le (Mary) Wang of China answered questions about her life, her country, and her MLC education as part of the Human Library Project during international education week. Students and professors signed up for sessions to learn more about the international students who are on campus with them.

During the 2024–25 school year, 12 international students are attending MLC. This includes students from China, Germany, Spain, South Korea, and Vietnam.

For more information, visit mlc-wels.edu.





MISSION TRIPS

Three students ventured to Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga., in June 2024 to help with community outreach and a soccer camp. After a busy week, Eli Schoof (pictured) noted, **“This trip left me feeling excited for what is to come. It shows that we can be successful in this field and not be afraid to spread the gospel.”**

EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES

During their time at MLC, education students are given experience in the classroom each year. As freshman Ella Bergemann (pictured) commented, “[Early Field Experience 1] made me realize on a new level just how much I want to teach. Hearing called workers’ stories of sharing the gospel (not only with kids but with their families as well), **I became convinced that there’s nothing else I’d rather do with my life.**”



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION NEWS

In November 2024, MLC received Higher Learning Commission approval for its online **Associate of Science in Early Childhood Education** degree.

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GRADUATE STUDENTS
IN 2024–25

URBAN MINISTRY EXPERIENCES

In February 2024, Ben Clemons, director of Urban Ministry at MLC, took 36 students to Milwaukee, Wis., to gain firsthand experience in urban ministry. Students learned about the day-to-day of urban education, gained insight from experienced teachers, and connected with students at four WELS schools in Milwaukee. As Clemons explains, “It allowed MLC students to see that, although they may be unfamiliar with urban contexts, the ministry that’s happening there is familiar in many ways. At the same time, **they began to see the exciting challenge of working with students, families, and parishioners from other cultures and backgrounds.**”





On May 24, 2024, **27 men received diplomas** for successfully completing their studies at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) prepares men to serve in the pastoral ministry by providing them with spiritual, theological, and professional training. Students attend classes for two years, serve as full-time vicars during their third year, and then attend classes and write a thesis in their fourth year. Throughout their time at the seminary, students receive opportunities to serve in a variety of ministries and to experience other cultures to help prepare them for their future calls.

In partnership with WELS Joint Missions, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute guides and assists spiritual leaders from a variety of countries and cultures through preseminary and seminary training. Since the program began, faculty members have taught throughout North America as well as in Bulgaria, Colombia, East Asia, Ethiopia, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine, and Zambia. Each year the Pastoral Studies Institute serves hundreds of students.



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VICARS IN
2024-25

VICAR YEAR

Each seminary student spends an internship year as a "vicar," learning and serving under experienced pastors in mission-minded congregations. Abel Bain (right), is spending his vicar year learning from Paul Biedenbender (left), pastor at **Christ, Denver, Colo.**, a cross-cultural mission congregation. Also pictured is Brock Ochoa, a senior at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., who spent a weekend at Christ, Denver, in October 2024 as part of the high school's Taste of Ministry program.

LUTHERAN HERITAGE TOUR

Professors Aaron Christie and Joel Otto led a Lutheran heritage tour during the summer of 2024. Nine students learned more about the context of the Lutheran Reformation and visited sites important to its development.

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FIRST-YEAR
STUDENTS AT WLS
IN 2024-25

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Grow in Grace, the seminary's institute for continuing education, offers a variety of courses for pastors both in person and online for spiritual and professional growth. Each June in even-numbered years, Grow in Grace hosts two weeks of courses on campus in Mequon, Wis., called Summer Quarter (pictured). In 2024, the seminary welcomed 55 pastors for Summer Quarter, including 11 pastors from overseas.

In addition to continuing education courses, Grow in Grace offers a mentoring initiative for new graduates, a clearinghouse of resources for pastors, and an annual retreat for pastors who are celebrating milestones in their ministries.



SENIOR THESIS

2024 graduate **Micah Otto** presented his senior thesis on "The Garden Temple: Analyzation and Implications of the Relationship between Eden and the Tabernacle/Temple."



MISSION AND MINISTRY

Every year in early February, the seminary pauses its typical class schedule for three days to hear and learn firsthand from those engaged in gospel ministry around the synod. As Ben Bitter, a 2024 graduate notes, "It is one thing to know that we are united by our faith in Christ, but it is a completely other thing to sit at the feet and learn from the experience of others who are currently serving in congregations and mission fields." Pictured is **Larry Schlomer**, administrator of WELS World Missions, presenting at Mission and Ministry in 2024.

DID YOU KNOW?

The enrollment during the 2024-25 school year is the **highest at the seminary in 15 years**. WLS opened with a total enrollment of 154 students, compared to 134 the previous school year.

For more information, visit wisluthsem.org.





Ninety-six students graduated from Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., in 2024. **Fifty-six percent** of those went to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., to pursue full-time ministry.

Preparatory schools

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., prepare high school students for future service as pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and congregational leaders. Both schools offer “Taste of Ministry” opportunities for students, which include shadowing called workers to learn more about their work. Students also are given firsthand gospel experiences on campus and during mission trips. Luther Preparatory School opened the 2024–25 school year with 415 students and Michigan Lutheran Seminary with 190 students.

“Every year the number of WELS eighth-graders declines,” says Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Ministerial Education from 2009–2024, **“but the prep schools have been blessed with steady enrollments, which bodes well for future numbers of called workers, especially pastors.”**

LUTHER PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Each year about 50 Luther Preparatory School students participate in a Project Timothy mission trip. In the summer of 2024, Greta Boettcher traveled to Hendersonville, N.C., to help Living Savior with its Bible sports camp.

“I never thought I could get to know people so well in such a short time,” says Boettcher. “The amazing thing is that the kids will see you for the second or third time in their life and give you a big hug. And while it is amazing to be preaching the gospel to these young ones, **sometimes it is them reminding you of the message.** I sat



by a four-year-old at snack time who just wanted to tell me that God never ever leaves his side and is always with us.”

MICHIGAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

On October 5–8, 2024, Michigan Lutheran Seminary sent 12 senior boys to mission congregations to provide a Taste of Ministry experience in a WELS home mission. Shadowing a WELS mission pastor gives students a new perspective that widens their view on ministry while encouraging them to consider serving in that way.

“The life of a pastor is not all about writing sermons,” noted senior Joshua Thompson. “It’s also about the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. He isn’t someone who just preaches, he is also a shepherd for the congregation that guides and cares for them.”



Pictured in the black shirt is Camden Fager, who visited Sure Foundation, Woodside, N.Y., for his Taste of Ministry experience. Here he is helping lead a catechism class with Jonah Schulz, Sure Foundation’s current vicar from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Called to proclaim

World Missions

WELS World Missions conducts and encourages gospel outreach in 46 countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 19 prospective new mission fields. World Missions brings the light of God's Word to the world through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials in foreign languages through Multi-Language Productions.

Forty-seven world missionaries partner with more than 500 national pastors to conduct outreach and to train more than 400 students for service in Christ's kingdom.

World Missions supports mission work:

- on **Native American** reservations, where the gospel is being shared on the Apache reservations in Arizona and the Native Christians Network has begun outreach to additional tribes;
- in **Africa**, where missionaries partner with national church bodies in 7 countries and are exploring outreach and following up with contacts in 16 more countries throughout the continent;
- in **Asia Oceania**, where 17 missionaries have joined together to equip, encourage, and empower others to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to 1.8 billion unreached souls;
- in **Latin America**, where hundreds of thousands of people are being reached through *Academia Cristo* online courses and 35 individuals are actively leading a group in worship and study;
- in **Europe**, where missionaries partner with national churches to train the next generation of church leaders and bring the true gospel to countries without a strong Lutheran presence; and
- through **Multi-Language Productions**, which has produced materials in more than 56 languages and reaches tens of thousands of English-speakers in more than 30 different countries through the TELL online training platform (see p. 12).



In October, **Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong**, celebrated the graduation of 13 students. Nine received certificates in either Greek or Hebrew, two received an associate of arts degree in theology, and two were awarded a diploma of Christian Studies.

For more information,
visit wels.net/missions.





Nathan and Alyssa Schulte (left) with Marcelo and Flor. Learn more about Marcelo's journey of faith below.

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ACTIVE CHURCH
PLANTS IN
LATIN AMERICA

COSTA RICA

Marcelo grew up in Argentina but spent his entire adult life in Costa Rica. An astute businessman, he worked in the insurance industry. In September 2020, he connected with *Academia Cristo's* online classes, which are taught by members of the Latin America Mission Team.

By September 2022, Marcelo had completed the first level of classes, and I began connecting with him one-on-one. As God worked faith in him through these classes, Marcelo became a committed Lutheran. He also felt it was important to share what he had learned with others, so he started *Academia Cristo's* second level of classes to train as a group planter.

I would visit Marcelo in Costa Rica and observe him leading his group. He was a confident leader, patient, and skilled at guiding discussions. Although Marcelo was a mature believer, leading his own Bible study group pushed him to grow even more.

In January 2024, he called me to study the biblical support for why we can forgive someone else's sins. We scheduled a Zoom meeting and started going through a few stories and Bible verses that show we have the privilege of announcing God's forgiveness to people. One of the passages was from 2 Corinthians: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:20,21).

When we read this passage, Marcelo teared up. **"Wow,"** he said, **"we really can give this gift to others. That's so special."**

Over the past two years, Marcelo was not only working on group planting, but he was also suffering from bone cancer. The cancer was painful, and soon he couldn't work as much or meet with his Bible study group as often.



ECUADOR

Nixon Vivar (right), a missionary on the One Latin America Team, visited Ecuador at the end of 2024 to counsel *Academia Cristo* students who are actively leading church plants. One group leader that he visited was Isidro (left), who is spreading the gospel in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

On July 2, 2024, the Lord took Marcelo home. I miss Marcelo's phone calls, his eagerness to learn more, and his correction of my Spanish when I made mistakes. However, I am thankful to know that he is in heaven now. His passing is a powerful reminder of our purpose as missionaries. We want to bring people along to heaven with us. Heaven is the goal!

Nathan Schulte, world missionary on the One Latin America Mission Team

DID YOU KNOW?

WELS has a presence in **every** Latin American country.

KENYA

The **Central Africa Medical Mission (CAMM)** has had a presence in Africa for more than 60 years—bringing health care and the gospel to the people of Zambia and Malawi. Altogether, the permanent, national-run CAMM clinics in those countries see about 70,000 patients each year.

In February 2024, CAMM—in partnership with the One Africa Team, WELS Christian Aid and Relief, and the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ—Kenya (LCMC)—had the opportunity to expand its reach by bringing a short-term medical camp to a village in Kirinyaga County, Kenya.

Approximately 1,500 patients came through the medical camp, which was staffed by CAMM volunteers, LCMC members, and county healthcare workers.

In addition, LCMC church elders and pastors worked tirelessly to meet patients' spiritual needs, connecting with each person individually or in a small group to ask them about their faith and their church home as well as simply to develop a relationship.



Volunteers at the CAMM clinic in Kenya

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STUDENTS GRADUATED FROM THE SEMINARY IN INDONESIA IN AUGUST 2024.



AUSTRALIA

Matt Doebler (pictured above left) and Peter Janke, two missionaries from the Asia Oceania Team, previously based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, relocated in August 2024 to begin outreach based in **Brisbane, Queensland, Australia**. The purpose of this relocation is two-fold—1) reaching out, in conjunction with two of WELS' partner churches, to the native Australian population with the gospel and 2) expanding outreach to a large Chinese population that has immigrated to the area. Members from WELS' sister church in Hong Kong who immigrated have already started gathering family and friends around the gospel message.

CAMEROON

The first day of French language school for missionaries **Jake and Maddie Vilhauer** in **Douala, Cameroon**. Jake, a 2024 graduate of Martin Luther College, has been called to the One Africa Team to assist with outreach to people living in French-speaking countries in Africa.



NATIVE AMERICAN RESERVATIONS

In fall 2024 **Nathan Wagenknecht** (second row, middle, in black) was installed and began to coordinate outreach to the Native American tribes in the Four Corners area of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. Missionary Wagenknecht is being tasked with developing a new model for Native American outreach, working closely with native Apache members who want to reach out to friends and family members from other tribes with the pure gospel message.



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CONGREGATIONS
ON APACHE
RESERVATIONS



UNITED KINGDOM

Weekly worship is currently being held in three locations in the United Kingdom—**London, Wolverhampton, and Manchester**. In London, sermons are printed out in five different languages—Urdu, Mandarin, Russian, Japanese, and Spanish—and made available for visitors and members to pick up as they enter church. This multi-cultural mission is being led by Missionary Michael Hartman (pictured), who uses YouTube as one way to spread God's Word. Every week Hartman releases a video to the channel "Discover Hidden Gems," in which he explores hidden gems in the United Kingdom as well as hidden gems in God's Word.

TASTE OF MISSIONS

Nine missionaries were commissioned on June 15, 2024, at Taste of Missions—five home missionaries and four world missionaries. In 2025, Taste of Missions will take place on June 14 at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wis. To learn more about this online and in-person event, visit tasteofmissions.com.

TELL NETWORK

TELL Network is an online leader training program from **Multi-Language Productions**, which provides an in-depth Bible study curriculum in English and other languages to students in places where WELS does not have a presence. TELL offers online biblical instruction to people around the world so that they can tell others about Jesus. Missionary Joel Hoff (shown left in Uganda) serves as a TELL missionary.



Ben Bitter, a 2024 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduate, was installed as a home missionary at Peace, Trinity, Fla., in July 2024.

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WELS HOME
MISSIONS

Home Missions

WELS Home Missions plants churches and assists mission-minded congregations in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking West Indies. In 2024, WELS Home Missions approved support for 14 new mission starts and enhancements as part of the synod's 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative.

The new missions include:

- **Bend, Ore.:** Bend was identified in 2020 as the second-fastest-growing city in the United States. A core group of eight families has been gathering twice a month for Bible study and planning as it plants a church in an area where 62 percent of people are not involved with any religious community. Thad Bitter is now serving alongside the core group as its full-time missionary.
- **Cedar Lake, Ind.:** Members from Trinity and Zion in Crete, Ill., have formed a core group to plant a new mission in nearby Cedar Lake. This area of northwest Indiana is growing rapidly as Chicago commuters look for cheaper alternatives to living in Illinois.
- **Conway, Ark.:** Conway is a growing college town in the northwest of Little Rock with no WELS presence. Before receiving support as a WELS home mission, a group of 19 WELS members were gathering at a local hotel on Sundays for worship and Bible study with a part-time retired pastor and getting involved in the community. Now the group is being led by Clayton Fury, a 2024 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduate, who was assigned as the mission's full-time missionary.
- **Easley, S.C.:** Since 2016, Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C., has been exploring the option of starting a second site in the greater Greenville area that includes Easley and Powdersville. Abiding Peace is currently offering worship and Bible study and getting involved in community events

from a leased home base in Easley as it evaluates where a future, permanent site might be established with its new missionary, Michael Quandt.

- **Williston, N.D.:** The core group in Williston has been gathering for 15 years, now under the name Lamb of God Lutheran Church. It rents a full-time ministry center where members conduct outreach and worship online with the WELS church in Bismarck, N.D. Members look forward to reaching out with the gospel with a full-time missionary at the helm.
- **Cypress/Waller, Texas:** A core group of five families is looking to plant a new church somewhere between Cypress and Waller, Texas, in northwest Houston. The population in this area increased by 215 percent over a 13-year period, making it an ideal area to plant a new mission church. Core group members are meeting regularly for Bible studies with Caleb Schoeneck, pastor of Beautiful Savior, College Station, Texas, and participating in community events.

Also new in 2024—Mark Gabb was installed as the administrator of Home Missions in January.

Learn more at
wels100in10.net.





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HOME MISSIONS
LAUNCH SERVICES
IN 2024

MINISTRY ENHANCEMENT SUPPORT

In 2024, **St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis. (pictured left)**, received financial support from Home Missions to fund a campus shepherd at its third school campus, which serves 300 children, most of whom are unchurched. **Mr. Brent Krohn** began his work as campus evangelist during the 2024–25 school year. He connects with the parents of school children, oversees the spiritual instruction of the kids on that campus, organizes baptism efforts, leads chapels, and supports staff. He also coordinates evangelism efforts across the three campuses.

Other congregations receiving financial support for ministry enhancements in 2024 include Calvary, Dallas, Texas; Crossroads, Chicago, Ill. (restart); Faith, Prior Lake, Minn.; Good Shepherd, Plymouth, Wis.; Northdale, Tampa, Fla.; St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; and Christ the Redeemer, Barre/Montpelier, Vt. (restart).

MISSION JOURNEYS

A six-person WELS Mission Journeys team from **St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis.**, traveled to **Bentonville, Ark.**, in October 2024 to assist this new home mission for four days. Ross Chartrand, pastor at the Bentonville mission, and the core group there partnered with the Mission Journeys team in outreach efforts. They surveyed individuals in the Bentonville town square regarding the strengths and needs of the community and how they see a new church meeting those needs. They also participated in a grocery bag food drive collection (pictured below), bringing in 44 bags of food to be donated to a local food pantry and providing opportunities to talk face-to-face with residents of Centerton, the home mission’s anticipated future home.



LAUNCH SERVICE

Seventy-one people attended the launch service of **Divine Savior–North Collin County, Celina, Texas**, on Sept. 8. As **Caleb King**, pastor at Divine Savior, notes: “The launch service is a big step in the mission-planting process.”

King also wants WELS members to know that Divine Savior’s mission work and ministry wouldn’t be possible without them. “The offerings that your congregation sends back to WELS make new missions like this possible,” explains King. “When I arrived, I didn’t have to worry about fundraising for this mission effort because of the generous offerings that God’s people give. I was just able to be a pastor and spend all my time figuring out how to get the life-changing gospel to people that need to hear it. **Whether you know it or not, you play a crucial role in the work and ministry of our mission and all missions across our church body.**”

CAMPUS MINISTRY

The campus ministry of **St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.**, gathered in September right after students came back to school. **More than 45 congregations** receive funding from WELS Campus Ministry every year.





The WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts was held July 30–Aug. 2, 2024, in Kenosha, Wis.



Called to serve

Congregational Services

WELS Congregational Services exists to encourage and equip congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry. In 2024, this included coordinating three national events—the WELS International Youth Rally; the WELS Women’s Ministry Conference; and the WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts.

The worship conference, attended by almost one thousand people, included concerts, worship services, and presentations under the theme “Sing to the Lord a New Song.” It made extensive use of new songs from the 2021 *Christian Worship* hymnal suite, accompanied by a wide variety of instruments in different styles. A festival choir, festival orchestra, honor choir, and children’s choir all participated during conference worship.

Artwork created to enhance the worship services was also on display. These pieces were created by the Art Service, which is overseen by Jason Jaspersen, a professor at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn.

Those who couldn’t attend can still enjoy concerts and services at welsworshipconference.net/media.



Learn more at
welscongregationalservices.net.





Teens praising God together at the WELS International Youth Rally.

WELS INTERNATIONAL YOUTH RALLY

From June 25–28, 2024, WELS teens had the opportunity to worship together, learn and study God’s Word together, grow in faith and fellowship with one another, as well as enjoy recreation and entertainment at the WELS International Youth Rally. Around 2,200 teens and 600 adults convened at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo.

“The comment I hear over and over,” says Kris Snyder, event organizer, “is **how incredible it is to be with so many teens who face the same struggles but have the same hope in Jesus**—that WELS teens from around North America get to be with so many other teens who all believe the same thing.”

She adds, “Worship in that setting with 2,800 people is incredibly powerful.

When do you get the chance to do that? When I heard the musicians, assembly, and choir all join to sing ‘Praise to the Lord, the Almighty’ at closing worship, it was overwhelming!”



WELS HAS
16,000
14- TO 17-YEAR-OLD
MEMBERS

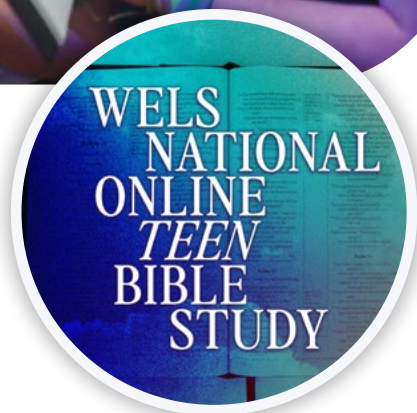
NATIONAL ONLINE TEEN BIBLE STUDY

Just two months after WELS teens joined together for the biennial WELS International Youth Rally in Colorado, more than one hundred WELS teens found a way to connect with one another again—this time online. Phil Huebner, campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis., led the first national online teen Bible study for WELS youth in September 2024.

Huebner worked with Oliva Hermanson, a 2024 Wisconsin Lutheran High School graduate with a heart for bringing teens together for faith and fellowship. “I recognized that there are teens across the country who do not have the opportunity to go to a school with almost a thousand people who share their faith,” Oliva explains. **“I was looking for a way to bring Christian teens together on a regular basis, create a space where we can discuss our faith, and make connections that are meaningful.”**

Oliva brought her idea for a national online teen Bible study to Huebner, who connected her with Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Discipleship. With the whole-hearted support of these two men and others at the synod level, Oliva played an active role in planning and executing the event she envisioned: “A Bible study for teens everywhere, with messages from lots of different pastors, and connections with all sorts of teens in situations both similar and different from your own.”

The National Online Teen Bible Study takes place on a quarterly basis and features messages from a variety of WELS pastors. Learn more at wels.net/national-teen-bible-study.





WELS WOMEN'S MINISTRY CONFERENCE

More than 450 women gathered in Pewaukee, Wis., from July 28–30, 2024, for the WELS Women's Ministry Conference. Focused on the book of Acts, the conference theme, "Empowered to proclaim: You will be my witnesses," was carried out in the conference's worship, Bible study, and presentations.

"The intent of our conference this year was to mobilize women through the work of the Holy Spirit to spread God's Word and share the saving message of Jesus in their homes, communities, workplaces, local congregations, and anywhere else God has placed them," explains Dawn Schulz, chair of WELS Women's Ministry Committee.

Interest in this conference continues to grow since the initial conference in July 2007. This year women came from 25 states and 4 countries to hear about ministry topics that are relevant to Christians today. Fifteen breakout sessions (with time for each attendee to attend four) complemented the four keynote presentations as well as the opening worship service and three devotions. Conference organizers put together a five-week reading schedule to encourage all attendees to read the entire book of Acts before the conference.

As one attendee noted, **"I loved the focus around the Word."** Learn more at welswmconference.net.



SAVE THE DATE!

The next WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership is taking place on **Jan. 19–21, 2026**, in Chicago, Ill.

CHAPLAIN CERTIFICATION

WELS Commission on Special Ministries, in cooperation with Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., offers a chaplain certification program that helps pastors and lay members better serve in healthcare facilities, jails, prisons, and military bases, which are all tightening their requirements for reaching out to non-members. For more information, visit mlc-wels.edu/continuing-education and choose "Certificate Programs." Pictured are chaplain certification students during a training session taking place at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., in June 2024.



TRENDS IN SCHOOL STATS

(Enrollment Growth/Decline — 5 years)

	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
ECM	9,803	11,672	12,009	11,799	11,338
LES	24,618	26,586	27,578	28,081	28,361
ALHS	5,874	6,041	6,413	6,779	6,879
LPS/MLS	581	605	601	602	605

ECM=Early childhood ministry **LES**=Lutheran elementary school
ALHS=Area Lutheran high school **LPS/MLS**=Luther Preparatory School/
 Michigan Lutheran Seminary

DID YOU KNOW?

The **Everyone Outreach program** was refreshed in 2024 so that congregations can now complete the workshop portion in five hours rather than eight. Everyone Outreach is designed to help congregations build a culture of outreach so that every ministry and every member is thinking about and participating in outreach. Learn more at everyoneoutreach.com.

NEW MINISTRY RESOURCES IN 2024

AN HONEST CONVERSATION

An Honest Conversation is a video-based youth ministry resource for teens and young adults to discuss questions regarding LGBTQ topics in a safe setting with an adult leader who has a good grasp of doctrine. Each of the five video sessions centers around group discussion with a panel of WELS college-age students who were asked to share their personal experiences of living their faith in a culture that is hyper-focused on sexuality. Hosted by Ben Dose and Pastor Bill Monday, each video includes multiple “pause points,” allowing young adults the chance to discuss what they heard and apply it to themselves. It affirms scriptural truth with an emphasis on speaking the truth in love. Available for free at welscongregationalservices.net.

GOSPEL HANDS

The Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing updated its formerly printed sign language dictionary, *Sign to the Lord a new song*, to an online dictionary with videos that help the signs be more effectively understood and shared. Known as Gospel Hands, the dictionary’s library of items on the site will continue to grow. Visit gospelhands.net.



APOLOGETICS: DEFENDING THE FAITH

Defending the Faith is a six-lesson video-based apologetics Bible study to help members thoughtfully and lovingly engage in conversation with skeptics of the Christian faith. Available for free at welscongregationalservices.net.

MADE. KNOWN.

The *made. known.* website is dedicated to “Walking with you in faith through identity, gender, and sexuality.” The name *made. known.* is short for “Wonderfully Made and Fully Known.” It is taken from two different Bible passages. Psalm 139:14 says, “I praise you because I am fearfully and **wonderfully made**; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” First Corinthians 13:12 says, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am **fully known**.” Even now, God sees us and knows us fully—not only our current challenges, but he knows the future he has in mind for us as well, and he promises to make all things work together for the good of his children. And thanks to Jesus our Savior, we are his children. To learn more, visit madeknown.net.



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

2024 was a banner year for these WELS mainstays:

- **The Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) turned 40!** In October 2024, WELS seniors gathered in Omaha, Neb., for the organization’s annual convention. In reflecting on God’s blessings the past 40 years, the convention offered an opportunity to look at the group’s future. During an open forum, attendees discussed a potential reimagining of the organization for a new generation of seniors. “The group asked, ‘What does the next generation of seniors want? What are ways seniors can serve their Savior?’ ” reports Joel Gaertner, director of WELS Special Ministries. “They contributed a great list of ideas for service opportunities and ways to support synod-related ministries.” Learn more at wels.net/owls.
- **Kids Connection celebrated 30 seasons!** Thirty years ago, *Kids Connection* was born out of a desire to encourage young children to “stay connected to Jesus.” Modeled after its adult counterpart *WELS Connection*, this monthly video gives children a glimpse into interesting ministries, stories, people, and programs from around the synod—with the goal of illustrating how kids too can live lives of faith in Jesus. Learn more and subscribe at wels.net/kidsconnection.

- **WELS Schools Accreditation (WELSSA) marked 20 years of helping WELS schools provide the assurance of a quality, Christ-centered education to families.**

Paul Patterson, associate director of the WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools, explains, “Accreditation is a two-part improvement process that a congregation would go through. The first part of accreditation is a self-study. A self-study is a congregation looking at a set of standards and identifying if they have or are doing the things listed in those standards. The second part of accreditation is a peer review. So, you bring in people from nearby schools or from other parts of the United States who verify that self-study. If a school is meeting 85 percent of our standards, then we recommend that the Commission on Lutheran Schools, WELSSA’s governing board, accredits the school.” Pictured is the team that oversaw the accreditation of Kenosha Lutheran Academy in Kenosha, Wis.





WELS Christian Aid and Relief

WELS Christian Aid and Relief developed the Community Care and Compassion matching grants “to help and encourage self-supporting congregations in reaching out to their community with the compassion of Christ,” explains Daniel Sims, director of Christian Aid and Relief. Congregations can request up to \$4,000 in matching funds to assist with efforts that help people in the community with physical, psychological, or emotional needs. A congregation can receive one grant per year for either a one-time project or ongoing service. Sims says the goal is for congregation members to be out in the community serving their neighbors.

One example of a congregation doing just that is **Peace, Loves Park, Ill.** (pictured above). Since 2023, members of Peace have been serving breakfast once a month at a community organization that helps people experiencing homelessness in nearby Rockford. The grant request from Peace listed three objectives: 1) Be a blessing to the people in the community, 2) Give members an opportunity to serve their neighbors, and 3) Proclaim the good news of Jesus at every opportunity.

For Christmas in 2024, the church handed out sweatshirts to those who received the breakfast. In addition to being practical and warm, the sweatshirts featured a gospel message: “Jesus—The Way, The Truth, The Life.”

WELS Christian Aid and Relief also distributes disaster relief aid, aid to those experiencing

hardships, and humanitarian aid grants to WELS’ home and world mission fields. In fiscal year 2024–25, Christian Aid and Relief is distributing almost \$500,000 in humanitarian aid grants—\$64,258 to Home Missions and \$425,896 to World Missions.

“Our humanitarian aid grant program allows our home and world missionaries to supply basic needs to people who are struggling and show them the compassion of Christ,” says Sims. **“This leads to many conversations about our Savior.”**

Grants can be used for things like water, food, medical care, mosquito netting for people who live in areas where malaria is a problem, and school supplies.

For more information, visit wels.net/relief.



Our Savior, San Antonio, Texas, held a community school supply giveaway.

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COMMUNITY CARE AND COMPASSION GRANTS IN 2024

Stay informed all year through these WELS news sources



WELS CONNECTION
monthly video



TOGETHER
e-news + video updates



FORWARD IN CHRIST
monthly magazine

Learn more at
wels.net/news-media



Support Services

MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving works on behalf of the Conference of Presidents, assisting with gathering Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) and encouraging direct gifts to WELS through mailed appeals, coordination of special offerings, and WELS Christian giving counselors.

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving worked with WELS Home Missions on the effort to plant 100 new home mission churches and enhance 75 existing ministries from 2023–33. From July 2021 through October 2024, 1,972 individuals and groups offered \$3.55 million.

Christian Giving is also working with Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., on a capital campaign to build a new music center and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on the feasibility of a campaign to enhance the school's education wing, offices, and auditorium gathering space.

In fiscal year 2023–24, Christian giving counselors made thousands of contacts with WELS donors and helped them arrange 191 major gifts and expectancies totaling \$43.8 million. Visit wels.net/givingcounselors to find your giving counselor and receive free, confidential assistance with offering a gift to WELS.



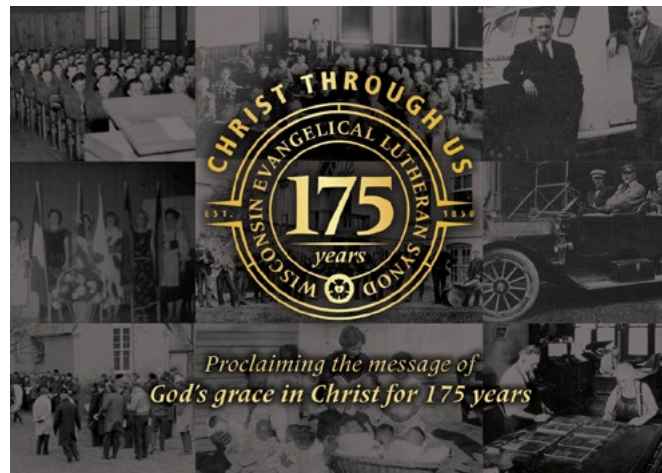
NEW IN 2025!

You can now watch a short **video biography** of each Christian giving counselor online. Shown is Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving.

DID YOU KNOW?

WELS Technology helps manage an online church locator tool. Visit yearbook.wels.net and choose "Organizations." It's ideal for those who are traveling or have recently moved.

Interested in a hard copy of the WELS Yearbook? Visit online.nph.net/wels-yearbook-2025.html or call 800-662-6022.



WELS 175: CHRIST THROUGH US

This year marks the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Wisconsin Synod. To help WELS members and congregations commemorate God's blessings, the 175th Anniversary Planning Committee planned various resources and events.

- A new book narrating the history of WELS, ***Christ Through Us: A Pictorial History of the Wisconsin Synod, 1850-2025***, is being released in summer 2025.
- A revised and expanded edition by John Brenner of Edward Fredrich's ***The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*** will be available in spring 2025. This is a more scholarly and detailed look at the synod's history.
- An interactive timeline of WELS history will highlight key events with images and links to other information.
- Monthly videos will feature interviews with WELS historians and also explore interesting aspects of WELS history.
- Various presentations on WELS historical topics will be sponsored by WELS Historical Institute.
- Worship resources are being developed for WELS congregations to celebrate the anniversary in October.
- *Forward in Christ* will feature the synod anniversary throughout the year.



Visit welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th for more information.

Called to support

NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE

Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) provides Christ-centered, biblically sound resources to the members of WELS and beyond. NPH publishes *Forward in Christ* and *Meditations: Daily Devotional*, elementary and Sunday school curricula, Bible studies, worship materials, music, and faith-strengthening books. In 2024, NPH released more than 35 Christian resources in print and digital formats, including:



- **Seeing God's Heart:** How can I be sure God loves me? If that burning question has ever been on your heart and mind, discover God's deepest heart—his sure and certain love for you.
- **These Words Are Written: Devotions on the Gospel of John:** Among the great twists and turns of theology lies a life-giving treasure that lights the way for every believer: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing in him, you have life in his name. That's what the book of John is all about!
- **What Does This Mean?:** Three hundred sixty-five brief, interactive devotions are geared especially toward families

with grade-school children and based on the questions in the most recent edition of Luther's Catechism.

- **Galatians: The Beating Heart of the Gospel:** Learn about the core meaning of the good news about Jesus—as it is presented in the book of Galatians.
- **When Cancer Comes series:** From Scripture and their own experiences, the authors of this three-book series share words of encouragement and gospel comfort with you and your loved ones as you face cancer. Included in the series is *God: Why Is This Happening?*, *God: Where's My Hope?*, and *God: Can I Complain?*
- **Musical pieces:** *God Is Here! As We Your People;* *Reformation Song;* *I Lift Up My Eyes;* *Lord, Let Your Mercy Overflow;* and *God's Promise Ever Shines.*

NPH released several other titles to strengthen faith, including *My 180: Waiting on God More, From Heaven Above, Hymn of the Day Organ Prelude*, and many additional books, Bible studies, and musical pieces.

Visit nph.net or call **800-662-6022** to learn more about the ministry of NPH.



Northwestern Publishing House brings its display to conferences across the synod. When NPH displayed at the Women's Ministry Conference in July 2024, the display included book signings. Pictured in the article above are authors **Michael Berg** and **Amber Albee Swenson**.

WELS INVESTMENT FUNDS

WELS Investment Funds began serving its first WELS congregation in April 2000. Today, more than 250 WELS ministries have entrusted their investments to WELS Investment Funds.

As of June 30, 2024, **WELS Investment Funds managed approximately \$325 million in investments for 255 WELS and WELS-affiliated ministries**, including WELS Foundation, Martin Luther College, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Luther Preparatory School, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, WELS Home and World Missions, several area Lutheran high schools, and more than 200 congregations.

By pooling resources, investors can enjoy benefits they wouldn't have by investing individually. As more congregations and organizations invest in WELS Investment Funds, cost-reduction benefits increase. It's a way we can support each other.

Does your congregation or school have funds you are considering investing? Contact WELS Investment Funds at **WELSFunds@wels.net** or **877-888-8953** to explore your options.

Learn if WELS Investment Funds can be a blessing to your ministry at **wels.net/welsfunds**.



WELS FOUNDATION

In July 2024, WELS Foundation was blessed to distribute a record \$4.5 million to ministry through more than 375 endowments.

WELS Foundation manages endowments set up by individuals, congregations, and other WELS ministries, in addition to the synod endowments that were established in 2005. These endowments provide ongoing support for gospel work, like the Vietnamese ministry at **King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif.**, led by Missionary Trung Lê (pictured above, left). This fledgling ministry is supported by the WELS Missions Endowment.

Interested in learning how an endowment can support your ministry? Contact WELS Foundation at **WELSFoundation@wels.net** or **800-752-8940**. Learn more about endowments at **wels.net/endowment**.

WELS CHURCH EXTENSION FUND

WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., (WELS CEF) provides financing through loans and grants to mission congregations so they can acquire land and purchase or build ministry facilities to be used for gospel outreach in coordination with WELS Home Missions. WELS CEF also provides loans to mission-minded self-supporting WELS congregations and schools for land and facility projects. The money to carry out WELS CEF's mission comes from investments and gifts from WELS members, congregations, and affiliated organizations.

In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, **\$16.4 million of new loans and \$3.0 million of new grants were approved to mission and mission-minded self-supporting congregations**. In addition, WELS CEF disbursed \$1.6 million of endowment and unrestricted net asset grants to Home Missions.

Living Hope, Chattanooga, Tenn. (pictured), a WELS home mission, received support from WELS Church Extension Fund as it purchased and renovated its new church.

For more information, visit **wels.net/cef**.



WELS BENEFIT PLANS

The WELS Benefit Plans Office (BPO) serves WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod workers and organizations through administration of the WELS Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association (VEBA) Health Plan, the WELS Pension Plan, and the WELS Shepherd Plan.

The WELS VEBA Health Plan provides benefits for church and school workers and their family members in accordance with God's Word while remaining compliant with applicable law. The VEBA Plan provides comprehensive, nationwide coverage. More than 80 percent of WELS workers and calling bodies participate in WELS VEBA.

Coverage and benefits provided through WELS Benefit Plans are uniform throughout all 50 states. This supports WELS ministry and the call process by providing access to high-quality, affordable benefits for workers and calling bodies regardless of geographic location.

Visit **welsbpo.net** for more information.

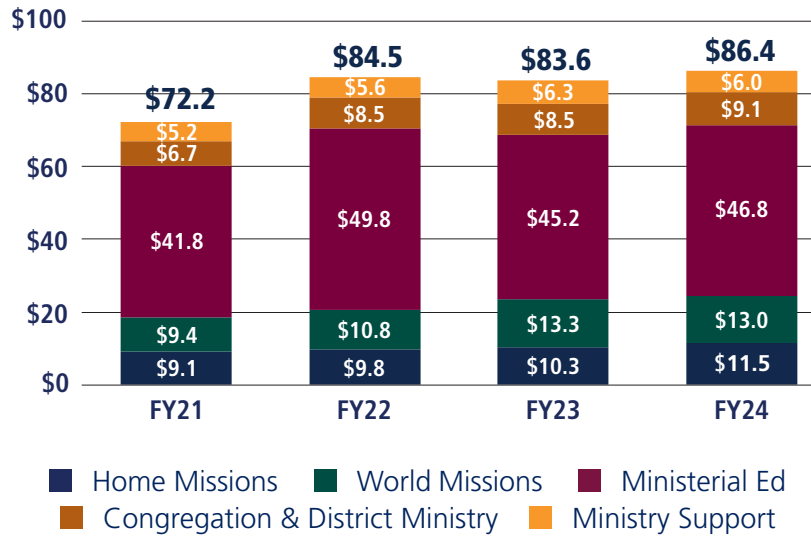
FINANCIAL SERVICES

Financial Services provides finance and accounting services that support WELS ministries and safeguard the assets that God has provided. These services include financial planning and analysis, financial statement preparation and audit coordination, transaction processing, payroll services, insurance and risk management, cash and investment management, and legal-related services.

“By God’s grace and the faithful stewardship of members across the synod, WELS’ financial position remains strong, with healthy reserves and consistent levels of giving,” notes Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS’ chief financial officer and treasurer. “We give joyful thanks to our gracious Lord for the continued, robust support through gifts, grants, and bequests, which enable the ongoing expansion of ministry. As we look to the future, we pray for God’s continued provision, that the synod’s plans may unfold according to his will and bear abundant fruit for his kingdom.”

Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) are critical to WELS’ financial position as they fund approximately 70 percent of Synod Operating Support every year. WELS finished fiscal year 2024 (year ended June 30, 2024) with CMO of \$23.6 million, which was 0.8 percent higher than the previous year. **WELS is thankful for the continued generosity of its people in supporting ministry efforts.**

SUMMARY OF SYNOD EXPENSES BY FISCAL YEAR (in millions)

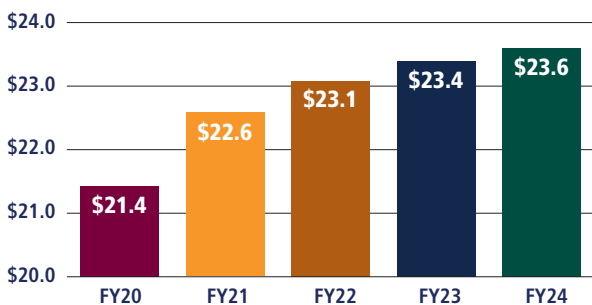


Other critical components to WELS’ financial position are strong reserves, including the Financial Stabilization Fund, which holds all undesignated non-CMO funding sources (gifts, grants, bequests, investment income, and other support) and is utilized every year to support approximately 30 percent of Synod Operating Support. The balance of the Financial Stabilization Fund increased during fiscal year 2024 due to higher than planned levels of CMO and other unrestricted support, as well as overall operating expense underspending. WELS is blessed to have this stability in

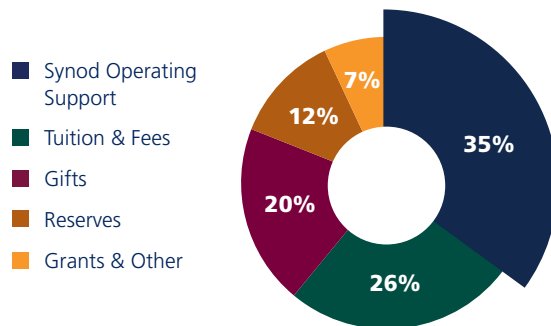
managing the operating budget year-to-year while allowing for the regular expansion of mission and ministry.

Between summer and fall 2024, the collaborative process of developing the synod’s ministry financial plan (budget) for the next two fiscal years (fiscal year 2025–26 and 2026–27) began among the areas of ministry, ministerial education schools, synod leadership, and the Synodical Council. The ministry financial plan will be finalized at the July 2025 synod convention.

CONGREGATION MISSION OFFERINGS BY FISCAL YEAR (in millions)



SUPPORT FOR SYNOD EXPENSES





Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive
Waukesha, WI 53188-1108

WELS *in brief*

As a Christian church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's calling is to nurture the faith of our members and to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

WELS is the third largest Lutheran church body in the United States with 1,241 churches, 330,687 baptized members, and 264,498 communicant members.

WELS has 12 districts to allow for more area-specific ministry, personal contacts, and member involvement.

WELS congregations—either individually or as federations—operate one of the largest parochial school systems in the United States. This system includes 276 Lutheran elementary schools, 345 early childhood ministries, and 29 area Lutheran high schools. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., a liberal arts college for Christian men and women, is a WELS-affiliated ministry.

WELS maintains four schools for the education of our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minn.; Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wis.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Mich.

WELS supports work in mission fields in the United States and in countries around the world.

WELS is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, an organization of 34 confessional church bodies throughout the world.

Five separately incorporated entities work closely with WELS to provide resources necessary to carry out WELS' ministry.

Known as the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, the synod's headquarters in Waukesha, Wis., houses WELS' areas of ministry and support staff as well as the subsidiaries, WELS Archives, and the WELS Visitor Center.

From collections that document the administration of WELS to individual congregational records, the WELS Archives helps preserve and share the history of our synod. Visit wels.net/archives for more information.

Tours to the WELS Visitor Center may be scheduled by e-mailing cmmtours@wels.net or by calling **414-256-3200**.

For more information about the **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod**, including a directory of local congregations and schools, visit wels.net.

