



Minnesota District
Mission Board

SPRING 2026 UPDATE

June, 2026

Current Missions:

Immanuel Hmong, Inver Grove Heights, MN (Cross-Cultural)

This past year brought both significant challenges and clear evidence of God's provision. St. John Lutheran Church (St. Paul, MN) voted to sell their facility. This uncertainty hindered longterm planning and threatened the stability needed for continued ministry growth. During this same time period, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Inver Grove Heights, MN voted to merge with Immanuel Hmong and entrusted their facility to Immanuel Hmong's care. On November 23, 2026, Immanuel Hmong relocated to their new permanent church home. This was a tremendous blessing that has restored stability and renewed momentum for mission work.

With new ownership comes new responsibilities. Immanuel Hmong's annual expenses have increased, plus they are assessing the maintenance and longterm needs of a facility requiring both cosmetic and functional updates. Many spaces were previously modified for preschool use, and they are carefully evaluating improvements that will best support ministry and outreach in the coming years.

St John / San Juan, St. Paul, MN (Cross-Cultural)

Over the past year, average Spanish-language worship attendance has been approximately 20–25 participants. Pastor Tim Otto continues to support outreach efforts through a Spanish-language Instagram account featuring short evangelistic videos. San Juan's core families remain actively engaged—sharing their faith, assisting with ministry events, and growing in both their understanding of God's Word and their personal faith.

The decision by St. John congregation to sell their property and relocate has had a notable impact on the San Juan mission. During this transitional period, San Juan is temporarily worshiping at St. Croix Lutheran Academy while seeking a more permanent location. The area immediately north of St. Croix includes a densely populated Hispanic community, making it a favorable and strategic neighborhood for a future ministry home.

There remains significant growth potential for WELS Hispanic outreach efforts within the Twin Cities. Several urban congregations are exploring similar opportunities, including Pilgrim in Minneapolis (noted below).

Due to the ministry's temporary location and the final year of Home Mission support, St. John/San Juan will not be submitting an MPSA renewal or update at this time. As long-term plans continue to be revised and a permanent location is identified, the Minnesota District Mission Board will retain this congregation within its opportunities pipeline for potential future mission enhancement consideration.

Risen Savior, North Liberty, IA (New Start)

In 2025, the mission in North Liberty became an independent congregation rather than a multi-site campus of Good Shepherd in Cedar Rapids. While this transition required members to embrace a new congregational identity, it was supported by ministry teams that had already begun forming and by strong encouragement from both congregations. Operating independently presents its own challenges; however, the congregation remains committed to maintaining a healthy, collaborative relationship with Good Shepherd.

In March 2025, Pastor Lucas Callies accepted a call, resulting in a pastoral vacancy for the remainder of the year. By God's grace, Paul Schroeder accepted a call to serve the congregation and was installed on February 15, 2026. Despite the vacancy, worship attendance reached new milestone in 2025, averaging approximately 50 people each Sunday. Campus Ministry proved to be a tremendous blessing, supporting both the congregation and students from local colleges. Community events—such as Easter Fest, STEM Bible Camp, and Breakfast with Santa—strengthened the congregation's presence in North Liberty and created new opportunities to connect with families. Members continue to bring forward creative outreach ideas, demonstrating a growing passion to reach the lost and lead more people into God's Word.

The North Liberty congregation continues planning a Capital Fund Drive and evaluating when to begin pursuing property options. Establishing a 24/7 presence in the community is a key next step, with current plans focused on securing a rental or lease space as they move toward a permanent location.

Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, IA (Mission Enhancement: Restart)

West Des Moines has truly been blessed. Since Pastor Brian Schmidt's arrival in late 2023, Beautiful Savior has seen significant re-engagement from current members and many new members. Average weekly attendance has consistently been in the 60's following many years in the 40's or below. In addition, Sunday School attendance remains high, and a teen class is held twice per month. The Sunday and midweek Bible Classes also seeing around 20 attendees each week.

Over the past several months, Beautiful Savior has continued to welcome new prospects. Pastor Schmidt follows up consistently with all prospects that provide contact information. A Bible Information Class will soon begin with approximately 5 prospects and several current members expected to attend. In addition, they have begun to focus on friendship evangelism by asking members to invite family and friends to attend with them. Their members continually look to share the Good News with their entire network.

Peace, O'Fallon, IL (New Start) DISSOLUTION

In 2025, the decision was made not to continue calling a pastor due to challenges within the core group. As a result, the mission was placed on hold. During this pause in formal ministry efforts, members have been attending another WELS congregation in the St. Louis area. While the work in O'Fallon, Illinois, has been suspended, the area continues to be viewed as having potential for future mission work.

In March 2026, a formal letter of dissolution was communicated to the core group in O'Fallon. The letter from the Minnesota District Mission Board requested that the remaining members of Peace O'Fallon, Illinois—most of whom are currently worshipping at Martin Luther in St. Louis—take the necessary steps to dissolve Peace Lutheran as an official and legal entity. The letter also encouraged consideration of next steps for future newmission ministry in the St. Louis area, noting that Martin Luther congregation would likely serve as a primary driving force in shaping a potential new plan, location, and ministry focus in the future.

The letter of dissolution was officially signed in May of 2026.

Faith, Prior Lake, MN (Mission Enhancement)

Faith continues to partner with New Creations, a childcare and preschool ministry whose facility is located across the parking lot from the church. As part of the property sale agreement, Faith retained the ability to provide the religious curriculum. The owners of New Creations agreed to this arrangement, and the relationship has continued to strengthen over time.

Starting in 2022, Mr. Ric Gibson, a retired principal from St. Croix Lutheran Academy, faithfully served as a parttime staff minister for three years. Each year Faith hosted New Creations' Christmas and graduation programs, as well as singing in worship services along with Faith Sunday School children. At the end of 2025, Ric stepped down from this role. In response, the congregation has intentionally worked to sustain the ministry by distributing his responsibilities among a group of dedicated members.

Pastor Stephen Schmiel has remained actively involved by welcoming families, regularly conducting chapel services, and building relationships with staff and parents. With more than 100 students enrolled, this partnership presents a significant outreach opportunity for Faith. Over the last three years, several families from the childcare facility have begun attending worship services, Bible Information Classes, and one family has joined the church. In addition, the congregation has experienced an increase in young families, reflecting its renewed and growing focus on communitycentered mission outreach.

Anchored in Christ, Greenfield & Rockford, MN (Unsubsidized Mission Status)

Salem in Greenfield and Cross in Rockford was granted unsubsidized mission status in Spring 2024, allowing them to continue working closely with the DMB while transitioning their ministry approach. The two congregations have since merged into a single multi-site ministry, with joint worship services beginning in 2024.

Anchored in Christ remains actively engaged in its growing community, participating in numerous community events and maintaining a strong focus on outreach. The congregation is seeking to further expand their ministry efforts in response to continued outreach opportunities and significant population growth in their area.

AIC will discontinue its unsubsidized status in July of this year.

Saint Mark, Mankato, MN (Mission Enhancement)

Saint Mark is a rapidly growing turnaround congregation that is effectively reaching people who are new to the faith as well as young professionals in the Mankato area. The congregation remains intentionally focused on its mission, core values, and strategic plan—an approach that continues to bear fruit. As a result, Saint Mark has experienced sustained and significant growth. Its outreach efforts have reached many unchurched individuals, while also providing meaningful spiritual growth opportunities for both new and longtime members.

This growth has increased the demands of ministry, including Bible information classes for prospects, intentional integration of new members, and the expansion of ministry programs. These efforts require a substantially greater investment of time in pastoral leadership and member care. In Spring 2025, Saint Mark was approved for a Mission Enhancement to add a halftime Manager of Ministry. This role will allow the congregation to maintain its momentum in reaching the Mankato community while also ensuring consistent discipleship and support for its growing membership.

Faith, Excelsior, MN (Request Differed in April 2026)

Anchored in Christ (AIC) Lutheran Ministries Greenfield & Rockford, MN (Request Differed in April 2026)

Mt. Olive, St. Paul, MN (Request Approved in April 2026)

For more than a century, Mt Olive has been a place where people gather to hear the gospel of Jesus. While the past decade has included seasons of both growth and turbulence, a committed and “battle-tested” core remains deeply devoted to urban ministry.

Mt Olive’s lay leaders recognized the challenges facing Twin Cities congregations and responded in 2025 by organizing the grassroots Gather WELS TC effort, which later developed into the Merge for Mission initiative under their leadership. Although the outcome of the merger vote did not unfold as many had hoped, the congregation now stands at a pivotal moment.

Mt Olive possesses a clear vision, a strategic location, and a dedicated group of leaders working toward becoming a healthy and effective city ministry. The congregation is debt-free, maintains a well-kept facility well suited to its mission field, and is blessed with creative and committed lay leadership. What is currently lacking is a full-time pastoral presence to provide focused leadership, strengthen ministry efforts, and amplify outreach to the more than 100,000 people in its immediate mission field.

Mt Olive is requesting a three-year salary subsidy to support a full-time pastor. This investment would build upon the strong foundation already laid by its lay leaders, refocus and energize discipleship efforts, and leverage the congregation’s unique artistic and musical gifts to create welcoming worship experiences that resonate within its diverse urban community. Mt Olive is uniquely positioned to serve as a healthy and vibrant WELS presence in the Twin Cities.

Their Enhancement request was approved at the April 2026 BHM meeting, and WLS graduate Minh (Ronny) T. Nguyen was assigned in May.



Pligram, Minneapolis, MN (Cross Cultural)

Pilgrim has requested assistance in assessing the potential for a Hispanic outreach ministry. Tim Flunker has been asked to conduct a highlevel assessment, after which the Minnesota District Mission Board will keep this opportunity on its nearterm radar for further consideration.

Hmong Ministry, Divinity, St. Paul & Holy Trinity, New Hope, MN (Cross Cultural)

Josiah Vang, a member at Immanuel Hmong, completed his synod re-certification and expressed a desire to assist with Hmong outreach efforts in the Twin Cities. Josiah's membership was transferred to Divinity Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN, an area with a significant Hmong population that remains largely unchurched. Beginning in 2026, Josiah began a tent-ministry, reaching out to his community with Divinity Lutheran serving as a base of operation.

Also in 2026, Alexander Xiong, a longtime member at Holy Trinity, New Hope, completed his PSI studies at WLS and was assigned to Holy Trinity for Hmong outreach exploration north of the Twin Cities, near Princeton, MN.

These opportunities are still in the exploration phases. There is potential to formalize these missions through Mission Enhancement submissions. The Minnesota District Mission Board will continue to monitor and remain engaged for future considerations.

Other Opportunities on the radar in Minnesota District

- Somerset, WI (Dual-site Mission Start with Salem Stillwater)
- Ankeny, IA (New Mission Start)
- Austin, MN (Cross Cultural / Potential Enhancement)
- Bloomington, MN (Unsubsidized / Potential Enhancement)
- Lincoln Heights/Des Moines, IA (Cross Cultural)

Our district mission board keeps a website for updates and resources: www.mndistrictmissions.com.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Stephen Schmiel (Chairman)

Rev. Robert Guenther

Mr. Galen Holzhueter

Rev. Mark Kaesmeyer

Rev. Brian Schmidt

Mr. Daryl Schultz

Mr. Glenn Schulz