

Committee #12

MINISTRY SUPPORT

Reference: Synodical Council RTTD pp. 41-44a.

Report No. 1

The committee notes with thanks:

- The faithful work of the Synodical Council members, both outgoing and incoming members, who serve the LORD.
- That financial support from congregations and individuals remains broadly “positive” but has not been keeping up with inflation.
- That annual Auditor Baker Tilly issued an unmodified opinion (the best possible) on the Synod’s financial statements and did not identify any material weaknesses in internal controls.

We encourage the delegates to take time to review the Synod’s Long-Ranged Strategic plan on pp.51-70 with your individual ministry staff & faculties, councils, and congregations.

Reference: Synodical Council Ministry Financial Plan RTTD p. 44b

Report No. 2

The committee notes with thanks:

- That the Synod has already begun the groundwork to develop a ministry financial plan for FY 28-29 along with a support forecast which estimates the amount of financial resources that may be conservatively available to fund the Synod’s ministries.
- The detailed description of how the Synod’s leaders work together to help make recommendations for proper funding.

Reference: Synodical Council Strategic Capital Planning for Ministerial Education Schools

RTTD p. 45a

Report No. 3

The committee notes with thanks that the Synod manages small to mid-sized capital projects through “quiet” phase to “public” phase, securing financing from major gifts and then using bridge financing to advance important proto mid-sized capital projects through the “quiet” phase to the “public” phase, securing financing from major gifts and then using bridge financing to advance important projects, such as building projects at Luther Preparatory School and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Reference: Synodical Council MLC Strategic and Financial Sustainability Initiative RTTD pp. 45b-46a

Report No. 4

The committee notes with thanks the consultant firm working with Martin Luther College, starting in the spring of 2024, that will address structural deficits and improve financial health.

Reference: Synodical Council Comprehensive Inflation Analysis RTTD pp. 46-47
Report No. 5

The committee notes with thanks:

- The foresight given to the Synod's leaders to study the advancing inflation and its effects on the Synod's financial plan and called workers.
- That congregational giving has generally demonstrated resilience over time.
- That Synod code for called workers is intended as "baseline compensation" depending on local factors like COLA, housing allowances, health insurance, etc.
- An additional modest annual stipend of \$2,400 for district presidents beginning in FY27.

The committee notes with concern:

- That Congregational Mission Offerings have not maintained the same inflation-adjusted strength.
- That rising costs are placed on congregations and called workers and are important to take into consideration in developing budgets and compensation for all workers.
- The importance of communicating the Synod Code to support all called workers to local congregations. It is often complex and needs to be explained and applied more faithfully and consistently.

Reference: Synodical Council Ministry Financial Plan Modifications RTTD pp. 48-49
Report No. 6

The committee notes with thanks:

- The \$200,000 increase to Michigan Lutheran Seminary in FY26 for costs related to elevator repairs (no additional synod operating support required).
- The \$91,000 increase to World Missions in FY26 special fund expenses for staff-related increases, including One Latin America Team and Women's Ministry (no additional synod operating support required).
- The \$500,000 increase to World Missions in FY27 special fund expenses related to Asia Lutheran Seminary professor and missionaries to Senegal (no additional synod operating support required).
- The \$110,000 increase to Communications and \$512,000 in FY27 in staffing, such as web design and digital communications strategists.
- The \$1,230,000 increase to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in FY26 expenses for the "Compelled Campaign" and additional vicar expenses (no additional synod operating support required).
- The \$630,000 increase in FY26 expenses for capital project costs and rebranding (no additional synod operating support required).

Reference: WELS Archives RTTD pp. 72-73a
Report No. 7

The Committee notes with thanks:

- That WELS Archives marked the Synod's 175th Anniversary in 2025 along with handling 200 requests and hosting 22 in-person research appointments.
- That the WELS Historical Institute website underwent substantial updates.

Reference: WELS Christian Aid and Relief RTTD pp. 73b-76
Report No. 8

The Committee notes with thanks:

- That the Synod's compassion ministries known as "mercy ministry" shows Christ's love to people suffering because of hardships. This often opens doors to directly sharing the Gospel. See more at www.wels.net/relief
- That in 2025, WELS Christian Aid and Relief dispensed \$592,899 for foreign and domestic disaster relief, \$387,221 in humanitarian aid projects to the Synod's mission fields at home and abroad, and \$429,373 were given to the Synod's members and prospects who experienced crises.
- That WELS Christian Aid and Relief partnered with WELS World Missions and other WELS-affiliates to provide disaster relief around the world, sharing Christ's love with many, many people.
- That WELS Christian Aid and Relief utilized volunteers around the world to assist victims of disasters.

Reference: Support Services RTTD pp. 77-85
Report No. 9

The Committee notes with thanks:

Technology

- That the WELS Artificial Intelligence Task Force, launched in August 2025, meets monthly to address the role of AI within congregations. Grounded in a "human-first" approach and confessional Lutheran theology, it provides guidelines that explore the practical use of AI that does not undermine ministry nor human connection. For more info, see www.welstech.wels.org/ai
- The roll out of HubSpot as the Synod's customer relationship management and communications platform representing 27,000 subscribers.
- That WELS web properties received more than 8.4 million total visits in 2025.
- That in July 2025, a 3rd party security auditor conducted a cybersecurity risk assessment of the CMM and an overall score was "good". Staff reduced technology vulnerabilities from 100 cases to 10 since then.

Financial Services

- Led by CFO Kyle Egan and a talented staff of workers help the Synod with effective financial services including payroll, financial planning and forecasting, and risk management.
- Partnered with payroll provider to implement and monitor compliance with the Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave regulations.

Human Resources

- Provides a robust HR department to help the Synod and congregations with personnel policies, benefits, and managing employee relations. This department consists of 2 employees: a full-time HR director (retiring in summer 2026) and an HR generalist (splitting time between HR & WELS Benefit Plan Office).
- Updates and maintains www.welsrc.net/human-resources for a variety of tools and publications.

Facility Services

- The Synod maintains a Center of Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wisconsin that has 49,000 square feet on three floors to support leaders and support staff.

Reference: Financial Results and Ministry Financial Plans RTTD pp. 86-98
Report No. 10

The Committee notes with thanks:

- That Annual Synodical operating support comes from 70% Congregational Mission Offerings and 30% other unrestricted support of gifts, grants, bequests, and investment income along with a Financial Stabilization Fund used to manage all unrestricted support.
- That the Synod is financially strong. Unrestricted support in FY25 was \$52.3 million. The Synod's operating and special fund expenses totaled \$50.7 million, an increase of \$1.2 million over the prior year, much of it due to the 100 Missions in 10 Years Initiative and other congregational ministries. CMOs for FY25 were \$24 million, an increase of \$434,000 over the prior year.
- That in FY25 and in FY26, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, WELS Church Extension Fund, and WELS Foundation are noted to be "financially strong." In the same time frame, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and Northwestern Publishing House are noted to be "financially stable".

Reference: WELS Subsidiaries and Benefit Plans RTTD pp. 138-155
Report No. 11

The Committee notes with thanks the work of the following WELS Subsidiaries:

- The WELS Historical Institute that serves the Synod in preserving, researching, and communicating Christ's love through our church body's rich history. They also maintain Salem Landmark Church in Milwaukee Wisconsin, the birthplace of the Synod.

- WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc. that has more than 2,500 investors with \$110 million in investments as well as loan portfolio including 187 loans with more than \$200 million in outstanding balances as of March 2026.
- WELS Foundation, Inc. that over the last three fiscal years has distributed \$47.9 million in donor gifts to the Synod's ministries. They have also administered 470 endowment funds with a total market value of \$168 million.
- WELS Investments Funds, Inc. that serves under the Synodical Council to provide investment portfolios for Synod's schools, congregations, and affiliates and currently manages \$400 million in investments.
- WELS Benefits Plans that marks the seventh consecutive year with no rate increases for the WELS Pension Plan. The VEBA Plan membership in 2026 is above its 20-year average with more than 80% of calling bodies participating. Plans increased 7% in 2025 and 8.5% in 2026. The Committee notes with concern that in the near future, VEBA will consider rate increases, potentially in the double digits. Deductible and coinsurance amounts may increase to maintain pace with inflation.
- Northwestern Publishing House whose purpose is to print, publish, purchase, sell, and disseminate literature that maintains Lutheran doctrine and practice for 135 years. While challenges to Christian publishing and supply-chains remain, NPH is positioned, God-willing, to provide long term sustainable service to the Synod. Over the past year, NPH has published many new titles including: "Who Do You Say I Am?" Answers Right from Jesus, Letters to the Expecting Mama, I Can Go to Church!: A Unique Guide for Kids. Many other valuable titles and projects continue to be produced.

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