Minnesota District Schools Coordinator Report

Minnesota District Council - November 2, 2026

1. Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers Conference

The Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers Conference was held October 15-16 at St. Croix Lutheran Academy. More than 300 participants attended the conference(PreK-12 teachers and staff), with approximately 215 attending the evening entertainment. Thank you for supporting your teachers and staff to attend this educational, uplifting, and encouraging conference where they also got to enjoy Lutheran fellowship with one another at the Thursday Night entertainment. I feel our MN Conference is one of the best in synod due to our Program Committee finding sectionals and key notes for educators who work at all age levels.

2. Theology-Religion Curriculum Development

The development of the new Theology-Religion curriculum is well underway, with writers already working on the materials. At our September meetings, District Schools Coordinators had the opportunity to preview portions of the new curriculum and provide constructive criticism. We are thankful for the work being done to provide quality, Christ-centered resources for our schools. The writers of this curriculum are hoping to be done with their portion of the curriculum in 2027. The team hopes to have curriculum in our hands in 2029-2030.

3. School and Church Support

My team and I continue to work with our Minnesota District schools and congregations, providing support and encouraging best practices in school ministry. This ongoing communication helps strengthen our schools and congregations as we serve students and families with the gospel. If you have questions on school issues, especially if you know of a school without a principal or pastor, please feel free to reach out to me.

4. Artificial Intelligence in Schools and Churches

I attended an AI Strategies sectional at the Teachers Conference, presented by Attorney Sam Nelson. (Many ministries in Minnesota use Sam Nelson, including several of us in this room.) He shared valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with artificial intelligence. One important recommendation was that churches and schools should have policies in place addressing employees' use of AI. Another important message was to not upload data or personal information or pictures of your students or staff(ex: taking a picture of a 1st grader and using AI to show what that student will look like in 25 years). Schools and congregations should consider reviewing their current policies and providing appropriate guidance in the use of AI for employees. Make sure your administration is attending workshops and seminars on the lightning speed growth of AI. One statement at Sam Nelson used, “Would you be embarrassed or would congregational members look down on you if they knew you used AI for ….(fill in the blank)? Good question to ask ourselves.

5. Reminders and Items for Discussion

- **Summative Assessments:** Please remind your principals and early childhood directors to ensure their summative assessments are updated on the WELS iCloud. It can be extremely demoralizing for a calling body to receive a call list with names that are not current.
- **Victor Vieth Presentation(ZERO ABUSE PROJECT):** Have you had any follow-up discussions or taken any action steps following Victor Vieth's presentation? Are there resources or support that would be helpful to your schools or congregations? The MN District is looking to have Victor Vieth speak to our ministries one time per year, whether at Teachers Conference or Summer inservice)
- **Pastor Mike Novotny - Taboo:** Have there been any discussions or follow-up opportunities related to Pastor Mike Novotny's presentation and his book *Taboo*? Are there ways we can continue these conversations within our schools and congregations?
- **Administrative Release Time (ART):** How is your circuit doing with Administrative Release Time for your Principals and Early Childhood Directors? There is a new formula for granting hours for release.(10 hours per week for every 60 students, 10 hrs/45 students, 10 hrs/30 students)
  WELS STANDARDS / WELSSA Accreditation on Administrative Release Time

Thank you for your continued support throughout the Minnesota District. May God continue to bless our work together as we equip students and families with the truth of God's Word.

LISTED BELOW IS A SUMMARY OF THE 6 PAGE COMMISSION ON LUTHERAN SCHOOLS (CLS) REPORT THAT WAS GIVEN AT THE DSC/ECDC EVENT THIS SUMMER AT SYNOD OFFICES. IF YOU WANT THE FULL REPORT WITH MORE DETAILS, CONTACT CLS.

WELS LUTHERAN SCHOOLS (CLS) REPORT

Overview

The Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS) continues to support WELS ministries through staffing and calling assistance, curriculum development, professional learning, school consulting, student assessment, leadership development, safety resources, and accreditation. Key priorities include strengthening Christ-centered education, preparing future school leaders, supporting students with learning needs, and helping congregations and schools serve children and families.

Staffing and Calls

The 2026-27 calling window for active teachers, high-school pastors, and school staff ministers runs October 15, 2026, through April 15, 2027. Calling bodies should submit requests at wels.net/callrequest at least two weeks before the desired call date and wait for confirmation before announcing a meeting. Call lists may be smaller because the Conference of Presidents is working to maintain a viable pool of qualified candidates. Local candidates not currently serving in called positions at WELS schools may be requested; names should be submitted at least 10 days before the meeting for vetting. Calling bodies should report results promptly to district presidents and the Lutheran Schools office. Principals and EC Directors are encouraged to make sure their teacher's summative assessments are complete and up to date so congregational calling bodies have an up to date and accurate biography of the person being called.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Support

Nearly 50 writers are developing WELS theology curriculum for early childhood, elementary, middle school, and high school. Teacher and student materials are being drafted through 2026, with writing expected to conclude in summer 2027; Northwestern Publishing House is preparing editing, design, illustration, and production processes. The Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) networks now connect about two dozen leaders nationwide to share resources and practices, including teacher clarity and making learning visible.

Nearly one in eight WELS students has a disability, an IEP/service plan, or classroom learning accommodations. A leadership team representing MLC, WLC, and CLS helps inform and support schools

serving students with special needs. Schools can also use MAP Growth, MAP Science, and MAP Reading Fluency through CLS/NWEA arrangements, while i-Ready offers K–12 Math and English Language Arts diagnostics linked to instructional strategies. Reported i-Ready volume pricing for WELS schools is $6.60 per student per subject/test.

Early Childhood Ministry

MLC's four-tier professional development pathway for early childhood educators has reached a broad audience: 2,430 ECE Basics video-module views across 179 early childhood ministries; 38 people prepared for a Child Development Associate credential; 75 enrolled and 43 completed Ministry Certification; and 17 enrolled and two completed an associate degree in early childhood education. The new "Rooted in Christ" support document outlines characteristics of Christ-centered, high-quality early childhood care and education, including best practices, planning questions, strategies, and resources.

Leadership Development and Consulting

Leadership shortages remain significant: as of September 1, 2026, CLS knew of 38 congregations/federations with a principal vacancy or interim situation and 15 early childhood director vacancies. Principal credential cohorts have been formed annually from 2023 through 2026, with another planned for 2027. Five men are completing the third year of principal training and become call-eligible October 15; five are in year two and six in year one. A new early childhood director credential cohort is planned for 2027, alongside traditional and hybrid director-training options.

School Consulting Services assists with school needs, accreditation questions, joint ministry exploration, school-choice programs, special-needs scholarships, and early childhood operations such as licensing, finances, policies, staffing benefits, waiting lists, classroom setup, and developmental checklists. Mission Together brings church and school consulting representatives together every other week to support congregations considering ministry changes or expanding children's ministries. Support for experienced teachers new to WELS is also being developed through research and a coaching pilot with Grace in Action and MLC.

School Safety, Outreach, and Shared Resources

Schools and governing boards are encouraged to review student-protection policies, staff and volunteer communication guidelines, abuse-prevention and grooming-awareness training, mandatory-reporting procedures, and school safety/threat-response plans. The Vector Solutions training library, available as a benefit to schools contributing annual support, includes compliance and safety topics such as mandatory reporting and bullying prevention.

The "Telling the Next Generation" workshops help churches and schools build intentional outreach strategies for unchurched families. Other resources include Heart Imprints, a free weekly children's devotion based on the church-year readings, and weekly Early Childhood Ministry Educator devotions reviewed by a WELS pastor. Annual Support participation increased to 285 school groups in 2025-26. More than $350,000 of the cost of staffing the Lutheran Schools team is covered through annual support, WELSSA fees, other fees, and grants.

WELS maintains advocacy relationships with the Council of American Private Education (CAPE) and the Office of Non-Public Education. Districts are encouraged to build relationships with state CAPE organizations where WELS schools operate. WELS representatives are also collaborating on strategies related to the Education Freedom Tax Credit and identifying scholarship-granting organizations and supports.

Online Learning Options

Amazing Grace Virtual Academy (formerly ALHSOnline) offers 46 online courses each semester taught by 34 credentialed instructors. Its reported enrollment includes 17 full-time students, 74 part-time grade 7-8 students from 18 Lutheran elementary schools, 18 part-time home/public-school students, and 275 part-time students from 25 high schools, including nine international students. The academy is helping three developing schools work toward full grades 9-12 programs. Britestar Virtual Academy offers K4 -12 online courses taught by credentialed Christian educators as a complement to in-person programs and as an option for microschools or online elementary classrooms.

WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA)

WELSSA's revised standards have been approved for pilot testing by the National Council for Private School Accreditation's Standards and Review Commission. Five schools are field-testing the revisions. After feedback and revisions, approval by CLS and NCPSA is expected in summer/fall 2027. Schools seeking accreditation in 2027-28 may use the pilot standards or the current standards; schools seeking accreditation in fall 2028 and later will use the new standards. Updated tracking documents, self-study templates, and a handbook are planned during 2026-27.

Seven schools are expected to receive first-time accreditation in fall 2026, bringing WELSSA's total to 165 accredited ministries across 15 states and serving more than 27,000 students. Eight additional ministries are in candidacy and are expected to seek initial accreditation during the next two school years. Those interested in site-visit service or accreditation information can contact welssa@wels.net

WELS Synodical Council
Meeting Summary – Spring 2026
April 24th & 25th

The Synodical Council met at the WELS Worship Center Friday and Saturday, April 24-25th. The meeting followed the traditional format. On Friday morning, the Plenary session was held which included the President's Report, the Financial Update, and Ministry Updates. The afternoon broke up into Committee Meetings (Ministry, Finance, and Administration). The meeting reconvened on Saturday morning for Committee Reports and Motions.

Plenary Meeting Highlights

- MLC Report – President Gurgel walked the SC through a presentation, which included MLC priorities, rebranding, and new organization structure amongst other things.
- WELS Trends and Implications – Jon Hein provided an update focused on key WELS demographic trends and implications. The report highlighted the overall declining membership – most notably of members under 65. The implications are soon to be felt in our area high schools
- Home Missions Update – Mark Gabb provided an update on the "100 in 10" program – 100 missions in 10 years. Manpower remains a considerable issue – 13 new mission starts are currently vacant
- Financial Report - CFO Kyle Egan provided a summary of financial results. While financial results remain strong and stable through the first 9 months of the FY26 year, there are concerns related to the FY28 & FY29 Plans. The current spending levels may not be sustainable.

Ministry Committee Update

1. Time was spent with President Gurgel discussing the financial sustainability and FTE reductions at MLC
2. An action item was identified for the Ministry Working Group to discuss possible partnerships between Congregational Services and BHM
3. An action item was identified for BHM to explore with COP all options for calling home missionaries

Administrative Committee Update

1. 8 appointments/reappointments to various WELS Boards approved (WELS Investment Funds, Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, NPH, Accounting Oversight Committee)
2. Church Extension Fund
    a. CEF 's liquidity position remains strong and is sufficient to support all anticipated mission loan needs.

    b. For the first time since November 2023, CEF has approved loans for self-supporting congregations and schools, including ~$7M for WLS
3. Church Giving Report - CMO's remain strong. CMO for 2025 reached a sixth consecutive record level.
4. Northwest Publishing House
    a. Sales revenue is 5% below FY26 plan; operating expenses are 7% below plan
    b. Lower revenue is due to decreases in sales of Christ Light, Sunday School, and Elementary School materials
5. Investment Balances
    a. WELS Investment Funds net assets totaled more than $400M as of the SC meeting
    b. WELS Foundation assets totaled $227M as of the SC meeting
6. District President Compensation – SC approved motion to provide synod-funded subsidy of $2.4K annually to each District President calling body, beginning in FY27 to be added to the District President's compensation

Finance Committee Update

1. Approved FY26 plan modifications for MLC ($630K increase) and WLS ($1.23M increase). No additional Synod Support was required
    a. MLC Modification – To cover rebranding and cafeteria renovation
    b. WLS Modification – To cover Compelled campaign capital project and vicar expenses
2. Approved motion to direct WELS Financial Services and Synod President to work with areas of ministry, support service subsidiaries, and ministerial education to develop proposed FY28 & FY29 biennium plan, using following key assumptions:
    a. 2% increase in wages
    b. 10% increase in healthcare costs
    c. 5% increase in insurance costs
    d. 4% increase in utilities costs

Minnesota District
Mission Board

Fall 2026 Update

September 17, 2026

Current Missions

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

Over the 2026 summer months, Immanuel Hmong continued to see steady ministry activity and encouraging engagement. Worship attendance remained strong, averaging in the mid-80s to upper-90s, and the congregation welcomed a healthy number of first-time visitors each month. Even with Sunday school paused for the season, members stayed active in worship and Bible study.

Outreach efforts also remained consistent. Between personal contacts and social media livestreaming, the congregation connected with hundreds of individuals across May, June, and August. These interactions created ongoing opportunities to share law and gospel with both prospects and returning visitors.

The congregation celebrated several meaningful moments, including two youth confirmations in May, a well-attended wedding in June that brought many unchurched guests into the building, and the baptism of a newborn in August. They also mourned the passing of a member who entered eternal glory.

Financial support remained stable throughout the summer, with offerings consistently supporting ministry work as the congregation continues settling into its new permanent church home. Facility needs—such as parking lot repairs, bathroom updates, and fellowship hall improvements—remain a focus as Immanuel Hmong plans for long-term ministry growth.

Overall, the summer months reflected a congregation that is active, welcoming, and mission-focused, continuing to share Christ's love in Inver Grove Heights while adjusting to the responsibilities of their new facility.

Risen Savior, North Liberty, IA (New Start)

Risen Savior continued to build momentum through late spring and early summer, with steady worship attendance and strong engagement in Bible study. Average weekly attendance ranged from the mid-40s in May to the low-40s in June, with adult Bible class participation remaining consistently high. Although attendance dipped as University of Iowa students left for summer break, overall engagement across members and prospects remained encouraging.

Outreach activity was robust across both months. Between pastoral and lay contacts, Risen Savior recorded 54 prospect contacts in May and 43 in June, reflecting an active effort to connect with the community. The congregation al-

so began using SimpleTexting to improve communication—a helpful step as they continue organizing and tracking outreach more effectively.

Several meaningful ministry moments shaped the summer. In May, the congregation enjoyed a well-attended fellowship event at the Ziehr family farm, strengthening relationships within the church. Planning also began for an August VBS, supported by MLS students, and early coordination started for fall campus ministry with University of Iowa students. In June, Pastor Schroeder performed a wedding for a member family, creating valuable connections with two new prospects. The leadership team also introduced the congregation's constitution and bylaws, with officer elections scheduled for September, marking an important step toward long-term congregational structure and stability.

Financially, offerings remained steady, with May supported by Home Missions subsidy funding and June showing strong local giving. Responsibility for financial management formally transitioned from Good Shepherd to Risen Savior, another sign of growing congregational maturity.

Overall, these months reflect a mission that is steadily strengthening—deepening member involvement, expanding outreach, and laying essential groundwork for future ministry in North Liberty.

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

Beautiful Savior experienced a steady and encouraging summer marked by meaningful ministry moments, consistent worship attendance, and growing digital engagement. Average weekly attendance held between the mid-60s and upper-60s, with several first-time visitors each month. Although Sunday school and Bible classes paused for the summer, preparations were underway to restart both in September, with a new BIC class planned for October.

Outreach remained active through personal contacts and a strong online presence. The congregation continued streaming worship services on YouTube, averaging around 40 weekly views with occasional spikes exceeding 100. Sermons posted on Facebook regularly reached 150–300 viewers, demonstrating significant digital reach beyond in-person attendance. In June, the congregation hosted a neighborhood cookout—despite challenging weather, members made several community connections and strengthened fellowship.

The summer also included joyful and emotional milestones. May brought an adult baptism and two adult confirmations, a highlight for the congregation. July included the funeral of one of Beautiful Savior's earliest members, which drew many non-members and provided a meaningful opportunity to share the gospel. In August, another adult confirmand was welcomed as fall ministry activities ramped up.

Financially, God's people were consistently generous, with strong offerings throughout the summer and special gifts directed toward mortgage reduction and facility needs. Overall, Beautiful Savior entered the fall with renewed momentum—welcoming new members, engaging the community, and preparing for expanded ministry opportunities in the months ahead.

Faith, Prior Lake, MN (Mission Enhancement)

Faith Lutheran began 2026 with steady worship attendance, consistent Bible study participation, and a small but active stream of prospects. Average weekly attendance remained in the upper-70s to mid-80s, supported by a strong adult Bible class of more than 25 participants each month. The congregation welcomed several first-time visitors and maintained regular contact with a growing list of prospects.

Prospect numbers remained stable, with 21–26 individuals under spiritual care across the past couple months. While outreach contacts were modest, the congregation continued building relationships through personal interactions and follow-up communication.

Financial support remained solid, with offerings over the past few months providing dependable support for ministry alongside the congregation's Home Missions subsidy. Faith Lutheran demonstrated steady engagement, faithful attendance, and a stable ministry foundation heading into the fall.

Saint Mark, Mankato, MN (Mission Enhancement)

Saint Mark experienced a season of strong momentum and expanding ministry throughout spring and summer. Worship attendance remained consistently high—often between 130 and 160—and the congregation welcomed a steady stream of first-time visitors. Prospect engagement was exceptionally strong, driven by an organized summer canvassing campaign that produced hundreds of neighborhood contacts and significantly expanded their outreach pool.

The congregation celebrated several meaningful milestones, including adult and child baptisms, an adult confirmation, and multiple families progressing through instruction toward future baptisms and membership. Saint Mark also continued strengthening its hospitality culture, revamping its usher program into a dedicated hospitality team and launching a weekly fellowship hour designed to deepen relationships and encourage guest connections.

Digital communication remained active through weekly e-news and regular Facebook posting, reaching between 750 and 2,000 people. Leadership also advanced several strategic initiatives: onboarding a new Manager of Ministry, planning for a second worship service to accommodate growth, and preparing a refreshed media presence and website. Summer events—including Saint Mark Summer Night and the July Men's Dinner—further supported congregational unity and guest engagement.

Financial support remained strong across all four months, with offerings consistently supporting ministry expansion. Overall, Saint Mark is transitioning from a "restart" into a firmly re-established congregation, entering a new stage of catalytic growth marked by high attendance, deepening discipleship, and an expanding mission footprint in Mankato.

Mount Olive, St. Paul, MN (Mission Enhancement)

For more than a century, Mount 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. Mount Olive's lay leaders recognized the challenges facing Twin Cities congregations and responded 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.

Mount 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. There is significant outreach opportunities to the more than 100,000 people in its immediate mission field surrounding Mount Olive neighborhood areas.

Mount Olive was approved for a mission enhancement starting the Summer of 2026. A seminary student, Minh ("Ronnie") Nguyen, was assigned to Mount Olive and was just recently installed on September 13, 2026.

Future Opportunities

Pilgrim, 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 high-level assessment, after which the Minnesota District Mission Board will keep this opportunity on its near-term radar for further consideration.

Hmong Exploratory Ministry (Cross-Cultural)

Divinity, St. Paul

Josiah Vang completed synod certification in 2025. His membership has been transferred from Immanuel Hmong to Divinity Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN, an area with a significant Hmong population that remains largely unchurched. Josiah is serving in an informal, unpaid capacity (tent ministry), assisting with outreach activities and Bible Information Classes, making use of Divinity as a home base. Should the Lord bless this opportunity, there is potential to formalize the role either through Divinity Lutheran or through Hmong Circuit Ministries, likely by applying for unsubsidized status through Home Missions. The Minnesota District Mission Board will continue to monitor and remain engaged with this opportunity for future consideration.

Holy Trinity, New Hope

Alexander Xiong graduated our seminary's PSI program in 2026. Alexander has a family and home near Holy Trinity, New Hope where they have been members for quite some time. Holy Trinity has raised special funds to compensate Alexander to carry out exploratory ministry to the north west of the Twin Cities (Brooklyn Park, Anoka, Andover, Princeton, etc) and officially extended him a Divine Call on August 2nd, 2026. Alexander will be gathering a core group of people and families, teaching Bible Information classes, and determining where an initial home base for ministry will make the most sense. It is likely that Holy Trinity will be able to raise funds for him next year as well. After that, the MN DMB will assist with an enhancement or unsubsidized status submission to the Board for Home Missions.

Other Opportunities on the Radar

- Ankeny, IA (Mission Start)
- Lincoln Heights/Des Moines, IA (Cross Cultural)

The MN DMB is making a plan to raise funds within the district to support mission work within the district. This campaign will take place in 2027.

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

WELS
Christ's Love, Our Calling.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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WELS Commission on Evangelism: Report to Conferences – Fall 2026

God's blessings on WELS evangelism *(From page 4 of the 2025 WELS Statistical Summary and Analysis)*

> ***WELS recorded 4,241adult confirmations in 2025, the highest total in its history****. Total adult spiritual gains reached 6,164, or 48 for every 1,000 weekly worshipers, higher than the 37 per 1,000 recorded in 2000, even though weekly worship attendance is much lower today. The encouragement is not limited to one region. South Atlantic became the first district in WELS history to exceed one adult spiritual gain for every ten weekly worshipers, and several other districts are moving toward that benchmark. Through the faithful witness of WELS members, the Holy Spirit is gathering historically high numbers of adults into our fellowship.*
>
> Another statistic worth noting is that the percent of WELS congregations with 0 adult confirmations has gone down from 46% in 2022 to 36% in 2025. Praise God for His Spirit's blessings on your work!

Come and See (NEW RESOURCE!!!)

Come and See assists congregations in encouraging members to invite unchurched people in their lives to connect to God's Word and God's people in their congregation. It includes a congregational survey which can be used to discover aspects of congregational life that encourage or discourage members from inviting the unchurched. The congregation can then address any aspects that discourage invitational evangelism. Removing these barriers will, Lord willing, lead more members to offer invitations to others. ***Come and See*** **is now available at www.welscongregationalservices.net.**

Everyone Outreach (www.everyoneoutreach.com)

A workshop-based program that helps congregations build a culture of outreach by identifying thought habits that hold them back, then providing follow-up resources to form new habits and behaviors. Over 230 workshops held; Spring 2027 now scheduling.

Congregational Evangelism Kit (welscongregationalservices.net)

Video-based training for congregational evangelism leaders and teams.

In Season and Out of Season

A three-lesson, video-based Bible study drawn from Paul's evangelism in Philippi. It encourages and equips believers to share the gospel in every situation and works for large or small groups.

One by One

A Bible study drawing on Pastor David Rosenau experience as a detective and parish pastor, he uses personal stories to show why every soul is a treasure worth the effort of sharing the gospel.

Let's Go!

Online, video-based personal witness training built on a simple three-part approach: love the unchurched people in your life, listen carefully to them, and lead them to the gospel.

Outreach Newsletters

Free devotional newsletters from the Commission on Evangelism, written for congregations' prospects. Find a library of series on the Congregational Services website that congregations can choose from.

Serving alongside you, *Rev. Eric Roecker (Director, WELS Commission on Evangelism)*
Eric.roecker@wels.net | *414-256-3287*

Minnesota District Worship Committee Report

District Council – November 2, 2026

Rev. Craig Engel, Prof. Craig Hirschmann and Teacher Mike Marquardt serve as members of Minnesota District Worship Committee. **Pastor Joel Gawrisch** has served as the coordinator for the committee since 2021, filling out the term initially held by Teacher Mike Marquardt. Please reach out with worship-related questions and feedback.
Joel Gawrisch: joelg@wels.us

Activity in the Past Year

- Worship planning and execution for pastoral conferences, District Leadership Workshop, and District Convention.
- Support for congregations for introducing resources, demonstrate flexible use of resources, answer questions, and assist with worship planning.
- Leadership Workshop presentation by Craig Engel on Worship Education in the parish.
- District Easter Vigil service held on Easter Eve in the Chapel at St. Croix Lutheran Academy. This worship event included singers, musicians, and attendees from three conferences in the District. The intent is to host the Vigil once again in 2027. #1 feedback: This is the best kept secret. Promotional help by District pastors is appreciated.

***Christian Worship Hymnal* Suite**

- *CW: Guidebook* is in final editing phase. This volume will help worship leaders make the most of CW21 "suite of resources" available at christianworship.com and online.nph.net/church-supplies/categories/hymnals-songbooks/christian-worship-suite.

- *Musician's Resource,* through NPH's website, offers downloadable choral alternates, lead sheets, modulations, ensemble settings, keyboard settings, and instrumental packs (SATB voices of pew edition settings in a variety of transpositions for instruments) for *CW21* hymns, psalms and liturgies. New materials are added regularly at: online.nph.net/musicians-resource. The committee has been intentionally demonstrating these resources at conferences and worship events.

- *Service Builder*
  Check out the training videos HERE.
  Service Builder Expert – mschultz.email@gmail.com
  Playlist Expert – davekriewall@gmail.com

***Devote Yourself* Email Newsletter**

- Recent articles: Using The Foundation / Bible translations
- https://welscongregationalservices.net/ministry-resources/devoteyourself/
- Subscribe here: https://welscongregationalservices.net/devote-yourself-subscription/

A Look Ahead for the Commission on Worship

- In cooperation with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, C/W will be developing materials for pastors who want to improve their preaching. This may include resources like refresher materials for those who have found themselves drifting when it comes to purpose statements, or good Lutheran video examples of alternate preaching styles.
- In cooperation with Lutheran Schools, C/W has begun a content development team for the new theology curriculum, incorporating resources for teaching Lutheran hymnody at all age levels. This collaboration began in 2025. The hymnology instructional materials published by NPH are available to congregations and schools who want to include hymnody instruction even as development on the new theology instructional resources begin.
- C/W plans to publish online Hymnal and Psalter Handbook resources, including the history and common usage of all hymns and psalm settings, and one-sentence descriptions of hymns for use in bulletins. These resources are currently linked through *The Foundation* (The Foundation – Year A 2025-2026 – CongServe)
- In cooperation with worship planners at WELS area Lutheran high schools, C/W plans to supply resources that will allow and encourage high schools to make the best use of the treasures old and new available in the new hymnal suite. Similarly, C/W will work with Home Mission personnel to discover which of the new hymnal resources work best in unique Home Mission settings.
- *WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts* will be held June 15-18, 2027, at Martin Luther College. The conference will have a "Christmas in June" theme to include resources for use in December 2027.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel J. Gawrisch

DISTRICT DISCIPLESHIP REPORT

2027 District Workshop

The annual district workshop will be held at St. Croix Lutheran Academy Saturday, March 13th. I've submitted some ideas for workshops and keynote speakers, but district leaders haven't met yet to confirm anyone yet. Details will be emailed out to the district as soon as they are available. Please mention this event in your circuits as info comes out.

Resources – Most resources available at WELS Congregational Services website.

- **Direct email subscriptions**: Devotions for families, teens, women, military, and more at www.wels.net/subscribe.
- **Suite of Marriage Resources:** *Marriage Moments, Marriage Maintenance, Marriage Keys, Marriage for Life* These resources provide weekly devotions, premarriage class, and a variety of marriage resources for Bible studies or marriage retreats.
- **WELS Online National Teen Bible Study:** Four online studies during the year, with the first held Sunday, Sept. 27th! The next one is scheduled for **Sunday**, **November 8th at 6 pm CST.** Led by Jon Enter.
- **MadeKnown.net:** A website designed for a Christian person struggling with LGBTQ issues (be it a child, parent, grandparent, etc.).
- **Women's Bible studies:** Many studies available at WELS website. Click "Resource Center" and "Women's Ministry." You can also find a module "Equip Women to Teach the Word" at WELS Congregational Services.
- **"Welcome Home"** is a congregational initiative emphasizing the importance and responsibility of church members caring for one another before they drift away. It's not just the task of the pastor or the elders. Resources include planning for special Sunday worship, sermon ideas, bible study handout & leaders guide, a promotional video and a startup guide. The program has been revised and updated since the 2019 version.
- **"Stewardship Legacy" Worship Series:** The first three installments of the five-part stewardship series are available at www.welscongregationalservices.net.) This third series on TEMPLE emphasizes four areas of stewardship: church membership, authentic relationships, healthy living, and a Christian view of the environment. We used it at Salem this year and enjoyed it greatly.

WELS Discipleship Survey "Highlights"

- In 75% of responding churches, less than 20% of members participate in a Bible study each week.
- In 51% of responding churches, less than 20% of member children attend Sunday School.
- 94% of responding churches listed "motivating members to attend study" as the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd greatest discipleship challenge. Respondents cited busyness, poor priorities, and a feeling that faith is strong enough as primary reasons for members not to attend.

Twin Cities East Pastors' Gathering

A little over a dozen pastors from congregations on the east side of the Twin Cities met in August to discuss opportunities for shared ministry and coordination. The next meeting is scheduled for November. While the cooperation is very much in the early stages, our members are enjoying benefits already in young adult ministry and youth ministry coordination. It is hoped future shared ministry will include men's & women's ministry, school coordination, and discipleship.

Potential District "Transformational Discipleship" Program

Salem in Stillwater is interested in becoming a satellite hub for St. Mark, DePere's *Transformational Discipleship* program. The program takes people through an 18-month discipleship program, through mentoring, book reading, and quarterly retreats. Those completing the program become leaders for the next cohorts. The program also serves as a leadership development program. Salem hopes to begin the first cohort in October 2027 but is looking for partner churches to help lead and fund the program.

WELS
Christ's Love, Our Calling.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
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WELS Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) Director's Report

September 2026

1. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO)

January-September 2026 $17,044,734 0.8% increase from 2025
January-September 2025 $16,911,304 2.3% increase from 2024

	Active congregations asked to remit CMO 2026 gifts*	CMO non-contributors as of 10/06/26	No gifts to WELS as of 10/06/26
2026	1,161	110	111

* = *Excludes Canadian and CMO/budget partners (e.g., dual parish, multi-site)*

Kurt's observations: In joyful response to our Savior's love, our churches offered CMO of $1.82 million in September 2026 for Christ's gospel work through our synod. This total is 10.9 percent ($222,000) lower than September 2025 CMO. On a calendar year-to-date basis through September 2026 (nine months), total CMO is $17.04 million, 0.8 percent ($133,000) higher than the previous calendar year through September 2025 and 1.5 percent ($255,000) higher than projected receipts. God be praised for continuing to bless us through his people's generous gifts! Go to mcg.welsrc.net/cmo to submit your 2027 CMO subscription and find resources for encouraging offerings.

2. WELS Endowment Funds

The Lord continues to bless ministerial education and missions through current and expected gifts to the WELS endowments established in 2005. By God's grace, the 2026 distribution was almost $1.6 million. You can learn more about how the endowments benefit our Savior's work in ministerial education and missions at wels.net/endowments.

Report of Endowment Fund Totals as of September 30, 2026

Endowment Funds	December 2006-2025	2026 through 9/30/2026	Cumulative Totals	Expectancies
WELS Min Education	10,831,893	1,308,503	12,236,373	13,481,301
MLC	5,039,646	555,528	5,697,389	14,395,396
MLS	620,046	37,428	669,455	117,206
WLS	3,201,069	468,299	3,727,949	15,026,036
LPS	1,145,796	68,087	1,236,004	512,841
WELS Mission	18,184,338	1,275,721	19,809,767	15,246,540
Home Missions	2,094,038	975,741	3,104,365	17,473,889
World Missions	6,149,282	583,666	6,834,288	10,507,242

Total	47,266,408	5,272,973	53,415,591	86,760,450

Distributions*	2023	2024	2025	2026
WELS Min Education	274,136	299,760	323,001	359,802
MLC	142,408	151,695	155,766	168,898
MLS	17,887	18,779	19,392	20,836
WLS	90,377	95,662	98,470	107,485
LPS	33,932	36,022	37,208	39,686
WELS Mission**	520,783	559,298	583,437	624,669
Home Missions	44,641	50,732	55,554	66,573
World Missions	133,858	149,623	167,818	194,926
Total	1,258,022	1,361,571	1,440,646	1,582,875

*Distributions based on the four-year rolling average as of June 30

**Distributions are considerably higher since the Mission Expansion Endowment balance (as of 6/30/2007) was rolled into the WELS Mission Endowment Fund.

3. 100 Missions in 10 Years

The goal of the initiative under God is to plant 100 new home mission churches and enhance 75 existing ministries from 2023-2033. Groups and individuals can learn more at wels100in10.net. Since July 2021, we have received gifts totaling more than $5.04 million. God be praised!

4. WELS Transformational Capital Campaigns

MCG is partnering with **Luther Preparatory School** on its **"Magnify"** capital campaign to build a **new music center** on the Watertown campus. On Friday, September 18th, LPS broke ground for the new center. During the public generosity campaign phase, we are inviting all WELS members to offer gifts or commitments for the project. By God's blessing, we've received gifts, commitments, and LPS reserves/events income totaling $10.4 million towards the $16 million project. If you (or others you know) would like to learn more about this initiative, please contact us at mcg@wels.net or go to lps.wels.net/magnify.

MCG is partnering with **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary** on its **"Compelled"** capital campaign to build a new education center, library fellowship space, and gathering hall and to renovate former classrooms to professors' offices. By God's blessing, we've received gifts, commitments, and WLS reserves totaling $12.51 million toward the $15 million project. If you (or others you know) would like to learn more about this initiative, please contact us at mcg@wels.net or go to wlscompelled.com.

5. WELS Gifts/Bequests for the Fiscal Year

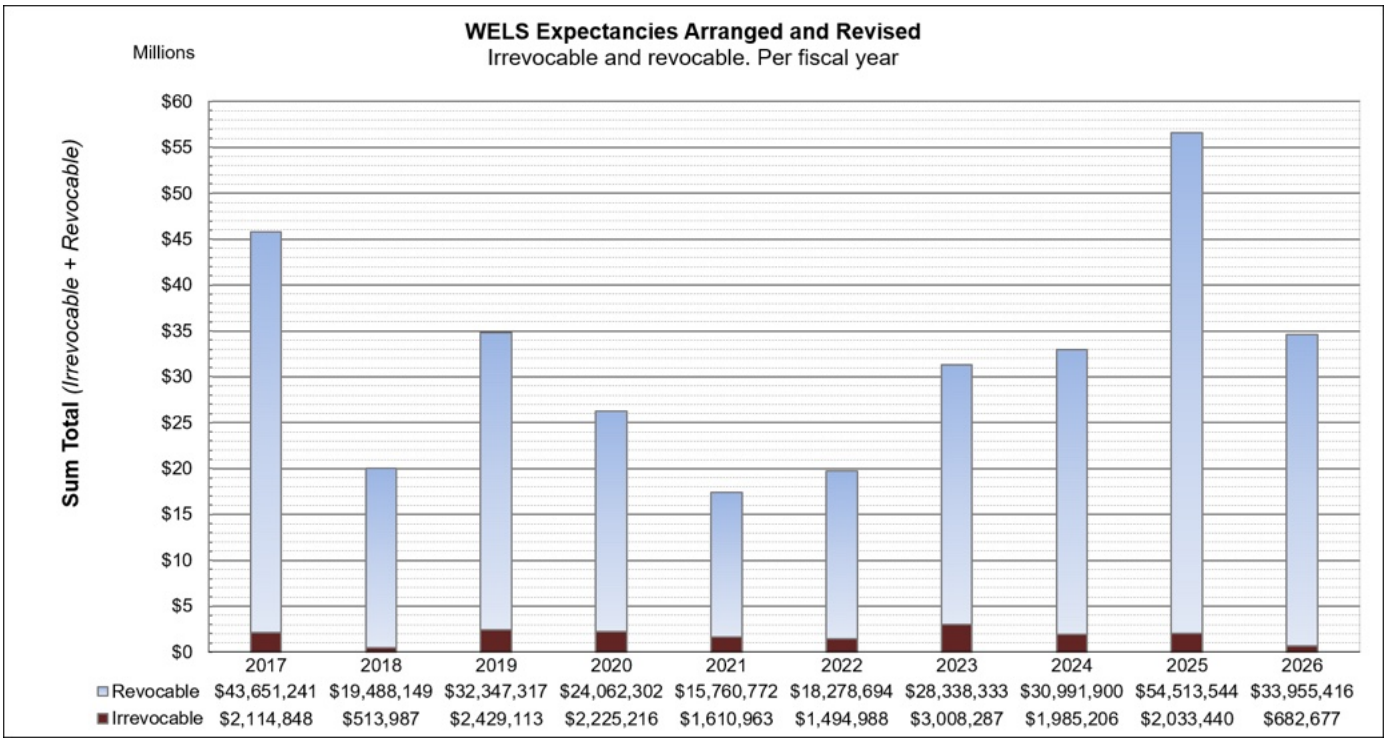
Unrestricted:	26-27	$ 4,329,599	Sept 30, 2026
	25-26	$13,134,751	
	24-25	$11,186,236	
	23-24	$13,125,167	
	22-23	$ 9,821,647	
Temporarily Restricted:	26-27	$ 5,646,977	Sept 30, 2026

	25-26	$ 24,158,960	
	24-25	$ 22,101,953	
	23-24	$17,312,326	
	22-23	$17,964,617	
Permanently Restricted:	26-27	$ 500,256	Sept 30, 2026
	25-26	$ 5,287,261	
	24-25	$ 3,117,035	
	22-23	$ 2,691,059	

Kurt's observations: Gifts and bequests come from individuals and foundations who support WELS now with direct gifts or who arrange to make bequests after their souls enter heaven. These offerings to the Lord are precious responses to Christ's love for us! For assistance in encouraging such gifts/bequests, request that a WELS Christian giving counselor give a presentation on smart Christian giving or Christian estate planning or meet with leaders to discuss how to encourage planned giving in the congregation (number 14 below).

6. WELS Deferred Expectancies Arranged and Revised

By God's grace, our Christian giving counselors (CGCs) regularly help WELS members arrange new or update existing deferred expectancies (irrevocable/revocable) for the ministries that touch their hearts. We heartily thank Jesus for prompting his people to arrange about **$35 million in new and revised deferred expectancies** from July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026. If your congregation would like to learn more about **Christian estate planning** and gifts that will ultimately benefit your ministry, please call your area's deferred CGC (wels.net/givingcounselors) or call our office at 414-256-3209/800-827-5482.



7. Charitable Gift Annuity Appeal

Each September, we mail a charitable gift annuity appeal, sponsored by WELS Foundation, to eligible WELS members. We thank WELS Foundation for offering this unique giving tool that enables WELS

members to arrange ministry distributions and personal income payments.

8. IRA Charitable Distribution Opportunity
Anyone 70.5 or older has the unique opportunity to direct qualified charitable distributions to WELS ministries from an IRA. These distributions may count as the donors' required minimum distributions; when given directly to charity, they are tax-free for federal tax purposes and may be treated similarly by their state. We encourage our people to contact their financial/tax planners or visit wels.net/qcd to learn more.

9. Universal Charitable Deduction
The Universal Charitable Deduction is a new, permanent tax rule that allows donors who do not itemize (who take the standard deduction) to receive a tax benefit for their cash gifts. It includes a $1,000 deduction for single filers and a $2,000 deduction for joint filers. Learn more at wels.net/ucd.

10. Donor-Advised Funds Gifts and Distributions

Gifts into WELS Foundation Donor-Advised Funds

26-27	$ 370,826	Sept 30, 2026
25-26	$3,404,554	
24-25	$3,116,732	
23-24	$1,473,051	
22-23	$1,829,215	

DAF Distributions		to WELS Funds	to WELS Synod Schools	to WELS Endowments	to Cong & Agencies	
26-27	$1,221,207	$ 89,827	$ 16,373	$ -0-	$1,115,007	Sept 30, 2026
25-26	$2,407,717	$ 172,737	$ 238,530	$ -0-	$1,996,450	
24-25	$1,574,529	$ 103,653	$ 74,276	$ -0-	$1,396,600	
23-24	$1,191,076	$ 102,740	$117,350	$ 30,000	$ 940,986	
22-23	$7,163,830	$2,045,082	$201,299	$ -0-	$4,917,449	

Kurt's observations: These special gifts and distributions reveal the fruit of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people. We consider it a privilege to assist WELS donors and ministries in these ways.

11. WELS Connection
November – Consider Ministry
December – Home Missions

Kurt's observations: *WELS Connection* shares stories of the ways God uses WELS to proclaim Christ's love to the world, supported by our Congregation Mission Offerings and individual mission offerings. If you would like more information on subscribing, you can learn more and sign up at wels.net/welsconnection.

12. *Grace of Giving* Newsletter
MCG works with WELS Communication Services and WELS Foundation to produce a newsletter that shares ministry updates and opportunities for supporting WELS ministry through different types of planned gifts. The April 2026 issue focused on the long-term benefits of endowment ministry, ways God's people may support Christ's work through their wills, and tips for promoting planned giving at your church. The November 2026 issue will focus on the helpful services of our Christian giving counselors and WELS Foundation. You can read *Grace of Giving* online at wels.net/graceofgiving.

13. Stewardship Programs

WELS Discipleship has released three parts of its multi-year congregational stewardship emphasis called *Stewardship Legacy*. This program emphasizes a "whole life" approach to stewardship, including our time, talents, treasures, temple (our bodies), and God's Truth. The third part of this program, *Beyond the Temple Walls: A Greater Vision for the Future Church,* is available at welscongregationalservices.net, along with *A Time for Everything,* and *Beautiful Truth*. You can also visit wels.net/stewardship for an archive of past stewardship programs.

Ministry of Christian Giving also produces "Stewardship Toolbox" resources, which are posted at mcg.welsrc.net. Use "Mission Prayers" to lead your congregation in praying for a WELS ministry each week. "Stewardship by the Lectionary" provides stewardship-themed devotional thoughts based on the weekly lectionary readings.

14. Planned Giving for Congregations
WELS Ministry of Christian Giving's "Planned Giving for Congregations" booklet helps church leaders encourage their fellow believers to provide for their loved ones and Christ's work through their ultimate gifts. The booklet and related resources are available at wels.net/congregationalplannedgiving. Churches can receive helpful counsel and presentations from their local Christian giving counselor.

Kurt's observations: I encourage congregational leaders to review this resource and implement its ideas to help God's people grow in their generosity through ultimate gift planning.

15. WELS Christian Giving Training
WELS Ministry of Christian Giving annually offers development training to WELS employees and anyone serving in development for a WELS-affiliated ministry. Over 20 people attended our 2026 session. If you are interested in attending our January 11-15, 2027 training, contact karen.martinez@wels.net.

16. Personnel Changes
Join us in thanking our Lord for adding Rev. Aaron Glaeske (Northern Wisconsin District) and Staff Minister Daniel Nommensen (Western Wisconsin District) to our Christian giving counselor team. May our gracious Savior bless their service to his gifted people!

WELS Conference of Presidents (COP) is calling for a new MCG director to follow Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, who plans to transition to retirement. God bless Director Lueneburg's transition and the COP's calling process!

Minnesota District Legislation Committee

Report to the MN District Council – November 2026

Employee and Labor Mandates

The state of Minnesota continues to refine the new Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFMLA) law that went into effect on January 1st as well as the Earned Sick and Safe Time law. Recent changes include:

- Rest and meal breaks for employees who work six or more consecutive hours
- Employees who use two or more consecutive days of ESST leave are required to provide documentation that their leave is covered by the policy
- Employees must be given time for early voting
- New rules regarding cannabis use
- Mandated reporting of maltreatment of minors

We encourage our churches and schools to update their personnel policies to bring them in compliance with these changes if they haven't already done so. A good resource is Mr. Sam Nelson (Sam@nelsonlawmn.com), an attorney who has worked with both our District Praesidium and our area Lutheran high schools.

Federal Tax-Credit Scholarship Program

31 states have chosen to participate in the new federal tax-credit scholarship program (the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit or Education Freedom Tax Credit), a federal provision that allows individual taxpayers to donate up to $1,700 annually to scholarship granting organizations (SGO) to be awarded to students. The taxpayer can receive dollar for dollar up to $1,700 in a federal tax credit. Various organizations have been urging the Walz administration to opt the state of Minnesota into this program before the end of the year. If that does not happen, Minnesota residents could still access the credit by donating to an eligible SGO in a participating state.

School Safety Funding

The funding School Safety Funding (for things like building security, security alarms, emergency communications, etc.) did not pass in the last legislative session. Look for it to be brought back up in next year's legislative session.

Minnesota District Constitution Committee

Rev. Jesse DeDeyne, chairman
Rev. Robert Harting Mr. Bradley Kletscher, Esq.

REPORT TO THE
MINNESOTA DISTRICT COUNCIL
MEETING AT NEW ULM, MINNESOTA

Dear Brothers in Christ Jesus: October 23, 2026

Our committee's charge is to work with congregations and other organizations within our district when they rewrite or amend their constitutions and/or bylaws. These organizational documents are important and give expression to how a group of believers has, in Christian freedom, agreed to work with one another in order to carry out the ministry of God's Word and Sacraments. We covenant with one another to serve our Lord together in full compliance with the teachings of the Bible, our Lutheran confessions, and the constitution and bylaws of our synod and district.

Submission & Approval Procedure

Whenever your Voters Assembly adopts any amendment to your constitution and/or bylaws, please be sure to include the following statement in your resolution: "... pending approval by our Minnesota District Constitution Committee." Then submit your proposal(s) to the chairman of our committee in either .pdf or .docx format. We also work with RTF and ODT – but not with Google Docs. When we finish our initial review, we will get back to you and await your revised draft which should incorporate our suggested improvements. Upon our final approval, we will forward your finished PDF document to our District President's office for his records.

Models

Model A and Example B retain the Voters Assembly, which shall have final oversight (authority) over the congregation's entire ministry. The term "Church Council" has been replaced by "Council of Ministry," which is elected by the Voter's Assembly to oversee ministry planning, operational decisions for carrying out the congregation's mission, and oversight of "Boards" and "Ministry Action Teams." Ministry Action Teams are "management groups" with no authority to manage anything. They are really task forces set up to carry out specific tasks which are assigned to them by others who do have authority, i.e., a board, the council, or the voters. Careful attention to the biblical headship principal must be kept in mind when establishing the duties and responsibilities of each Ministry Action Team and how it will function internally and in relation to the rest of the congregation's structure (even with titles such as chairman, leader, coordinator, etc., which may imply headship).

Model A is designed for small congregations. The intent is for a "Council of Ministry" to build consensus through regular ministry updates to the congregation using various communication methods, open forum settings which allow for discussion, and the use of straw polls.

Model B is intended for larger congregations in which a consensus building approach would be too cumbersome.

Model C (Council Model): This "Presbyterian-type" structure is self-propagating and nimble, making it effective for missions or congregations with very strong, unified leadership. However, there are potential ***Risks of Sample C which include:*** "stacking" the council with like-minded individuals, a lack of congregational engagement, and a high risk of failure if the pastor or leadership loses influence.

Further Considerations

Legal and Doctrinal Considerations

- *Unalterable Articles*: Changing "unalterable" articles is generally permissible if the underlying doctrine remains unchanged, though this is subject to specific state laws.
- *State Law Variance*: Legal specifics regarding bylaws and constitutions vary by state, requiring local legal counsel or state-specific review.

With you in Christ's service,
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