

THE MINNESOTA DISTRICT
PRESIDENT'S REPORT
<MN DISTRICT COUNCIL>



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Eat and Serve Wholesome Soul Food

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. ~ Romans 3:20-22

Last week I cut into an onion while preparing a meal. Outwardly it appeared fresh and wholesome. However, a cut down the middle revealed a brownish, mushy, putrid core. It quickly landed in the waste basket. Outward appearances are often misleading.

Across the spiritual landscape of world religions and in more than a few Christian denominations, what appears as wholesome soul food is nothing more than rotten refuse. Martin Luther captured this truth well in the theses of his Heidelberg Disputation. Permit me to focus on two of them.

Theses 1 - The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him.

If my evil behavior is the cause of my problems in life and with God, it stands to reason my good behavior is the solution to my temporal struggles and my relationship with God. The law of God is a ladder to heaven if we can stay on it. The problem is, we aren't even born on that ladder and can't get on it. The law assumes and demands a heart that lives for God above all things. The soul who outwardly keeps the law to gain earthly prosperity and a good standing with God is loving and serving self above God. At his core he is an idolater. To the unbelieving mind the law appears to be its salvation. Nevertheless, apart from grace it leads to trust in self and therefore hinders any movement toward righteousness.

Theses 26 The law says, »do this«, and it is never done. Grace says, »believe in this«, and everything is already done.

The law is powerless to create love for God in us. It only leads us to loathe him because it asks what is impossible for us to do. How wonderful is God's grace in contrast. In Christ all is accomplished. Christ loved and served his Father perfectly for us. Christ satisfied the law's curse bearing all God's anger against us. Because in Christ nothing remains to be done by us for ourselves, we are free and empowered to do all things for God out of love for God.

This is the wholesome soul food God has preserved through the centuries and made known to us. This is the sweet and forever satisfying Word of life we are privileged and called to proclaim. "Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Brothers, rejoice that your names are already written in heaven and may God bless your thankful service to him.

In Christ, our Righteousness,

Pastor Dennis Klatt

Called Worker Vacancy Update

Pastor Vacancies

Synod wide there are 161 pastor vacancies, 148 of those are parish vacancies. In the Minnesota District there are currently 24 parishes actively calling pastors. Martin Luther College will begin calling for two pastor trained positions on 10/15. You will note six congregations are not actively calling due to either current merger/joint ministry conversations or inability to support a pastor.

***Christ, North St. Paul/Hugo, MN
(Associate Pastor)
***Hope, Andover, MN
***Calvary, Glenwood/ St. John, Hancock
**Good Shepherd, Burnsville (Associate
Pastor)
*Grace, South St. Paul, MN
**Crown of Life, West. St. Paul, MN
(Associate Pastor)
*Christ, Zumbrota, MN
*St. John's, Redwood Falls, MN (Associate
Pastor)
*St. John's, Lake City, MN
*Beautiful Savior, Austin, MN
*Zion, Sanborn, MN
*St. John, Glencoe, MN
*Shepherd of the Hills, Duluth, MN
Christ Alone, Dardenne Prairie, MO
St. Peter, St. Peter, MN (Calling but not
vacant)
Trinity, Nicollet, MN

Risen Savior, North Liberty, IA
Pilgrim, Minneapolis, MN***
Mt. Olive, St. Paul, MN
St. John, Caledonia, MN
Immanuel, La Crescent/Zion, Hokah, MN
St. Mark, Bemidji, MN
St. Peter, Monticello, MN
Grace, Oskaloosa, IA
****Zion, Olivia, MN
****Grace, Nye Twshp (Osceola) WI
****St. John, Boyd (Omro Township), MN
****Zion, Russell, MN
****Zion, Morton, MN
****Grace, Clear Lake, WI/Zion Almena, WI
MLC, New Ulm, MN – Professor of English
MLC, New Ulm, MN – Professor of Theology
& Staff Ministry

*Vacant for over one year
**Vacant for over two years
***Vacant for over three years
****Not actively calling

Pastor call hiatuses

The COP has again decided to observe pastor call hiatuses around Christmas and Easter. Around Christmas, calls will not be issued Friday, December 12 through Sunday, January 11. Around Easter, calls will not be issued Saturday, March 28 through Wednesday, April 10.

Recent District Ministry Changes

Calls Accepted Out of the District

6/17/2025 – Benjamin Zamzow (St. Mark, Bemidji, MN) accepted the call to Living Word, Petaluma, CA

6/26/2025 – Aaron Jensen (St. Peter, Monticello, MN) accepted the call to WLS, Mequon, WI

Calls Accepted into the District

8/1/2025 – Seth Krueger (Mt. Olive, Overland Park, KS) accepted the call Divinity, St. Paul, MN
8/30/2025 – Todd Krueger (Zion, Eitzen, MN) accepted the call to serve Zion, Springfield/Peace, Marshfield, MO

District Congregation Changes

St. John, St. Paul has voted to sell their current property with the goal moving to a facility better suited to their membership numbers and be better positioned to carry out Hispanic ministry.

Shepherd of the Hills, Inver Grove Heights has sold their campus to Immanuel Hmong at the cost of the remaining mortgage on their property. Shepherd of the Hills will hold its final worship service on November 16th and Immanuel Hmong will hold its first worship service their new facilities November 26th.

MN District Current Teacher Vacancies

- 1 – College Professor – Teacher trained
Martin Luther College – Professor of Special Education

- 8 - Principal Vacancies
 - Good Shepherd, Burnsville, MN
 - St. John, Lake City, MN
 - St. John, Caledonia, MN
 - Christ (Samuel), Marshall, MN
 - St. Peter, St. Peter, MN
 - Trinity, Nicollet, MN
 - St. Croix Lutheran Academy Middle School, West St. Paul, MN
 - Anchored in Christ, Greenfield, MN

- 3 - ALHS Instructor/Mission Advancement Vacancies
 - Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, MN – Dean of Students
 - Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, MN – Athletic Director
 - SCLA, West St. Paul, MN – Director of Mission Advancement

- 6 - LES Vacancies
 - Good Shepherd, Burnsville, MN – Grades 7-8
 - Resurrection, Rochester, MN – Grades 7-8
 - Immanuel/Grace, Hutchinson, MN – Grades 3-5
 - Christ, North St. Paul, MN – Grade 4
 - Crown of Life, West St. Paul, MN – Grade 3
 - Bloomington, Bloomington, MN – Grade 3
 - St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN – Grade 3
 - Trinity, Belle Plaine, MN – Grades 1-2; Fine Arts

3 – ECM Vacancies

Little Lambs, Duluth, MN
MLC ECLC, New Ulm, MN
Christ, Cambridge, MN

The Teacher Call Window opened October 15th and will run through Monday, April 15, 2026. Ministries looking to fill a vacancy or new position are asked to request a candidate list using the [WELS Online Call Request System](#). **Teachers are considered call eligible if they have competed the third year of their assigned call or two years of a call subsequent to assignment.** Please see the guidance for acknowledging and deliberating a divine call posted on the MN District Teacher's Conference resource page.

WELS Teacher Calling Volume

Commission On Lutheran Schools (CLS) reports that across WELS for week 1 of the calling window, October 15-21, 100 teacher calls were extended. For week 2, October 22-26, 14 teacher calls were extended.

Self-assessment updates

Called worker self-assessments are the primary means for calling bodies to consider the strengths and preferences of candidates at call meetings. Therefore, it is important that each called worker 1) complete a self-assessment and 2) update it every year or two. Complete and up-to-date records help to promote confidence in our call system. To access and update your online assessment data go to cloud.wels.net/me.

Ministry Certification & Minister of the Gospel Tax Status

Teachers issued provisional calls must be enrolled in the WELS Ministry Certification program through Martin Luther College to qualify for Minister of the Gospel tax status with the IRS. Provisionally called teachers who fail to enroll must have FICA withheld and submitted by the calling body. **Going forward, non-certified provisionally called teachers are encouraged to enroll in the WELS Ministry Certification program before they are installed.**

Minnesota District News

District Appointments

Rev. Stephen Schmiel accepted the appointment to serve as Mission Board Chairman. He succeeds Steve Waldschmidt who accepted a call out of the district.

Rev. Brian Schmidt accepted the appointment to serve as the successor to Dustin Seivert who stepped down due to the press of other duties.

We thank Steve and Dustin for their faithful service and petition our Lord to bless Stephen and Brian as they serve the Kingdom and us on the MN District Mission Board.

WELS News

Philosophy of WELS Lutheran Schools

With more states implementing “school choice” type funding for parents to enroll their children in private schools, interest in our WELS schools has increased and is likely to continue increasing. Increased enrollment at our WELS schools will naturally increase the demand for WELS teachers, which are already in short supply. With that in mind, the Conference of Presidents is encouraging WELS schools to review their philosophy of education. Does your school exist:

- a) primarily to nurture member children
- b) to carry out both nurture and outreach (Are unchurched children given priority over non WELS/ELS Christian children?)
- c) primarily as a mercy ministry (to provide a quality education in an environment safer than local public schools)?

We are encouraging schools not to grow just because they can. Rather we encourage each school to develop a philosophy of purpose that directs its enrollment policy and enrollment cap. I plan to review the philosophy summary document with the circuit pastors and principals of the MN District.

Bible Translation Choice for New Theology Curriculum:

The Conference of Presidents (COP) has recommend use of the New International Version 2011 (NIV) and Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) for inclusion in the new theology curriculum.

Church Governance Resources

The Conference of Presidents has approved three new church governance samples for congregations to consider. Samples A and B have a consensus structure that retains a voters assembly. Sample A is flexible enough to fit most WELS congregations. Sample B is best considered by larger congregations. Sample C is for congregations considering a consensus form of governance with a Leadership Council making final decisions with input from all adult members. A training meeting has been held with the 12 district constitution committees. These Samples will be reviewed with the circuit pastors during our CP conference meetings this week.

A Common Philosophy of Lutheran Education in WELS

Introduction

The Conference of Presidents (COP) has been asked to articulate a common philosophy of ministry in our Lutheran schools. This document is intended to serve as a useful summary of that philosophy. It draws on a longer study document that was prepared by Jon Hein and Phil Hirsch and a lengthy discussion by the COP. The document prepared by Pastors Hein and Hirsch is included as an appendix to this document.

A common philosophy of Lutheran education does not mean that every Lutheran school will look and function the same. What it does mean is that every school in our synod will share a common understanding of, and commitment to, the basic scriptural principles, beliefs, and values that are at the foundation of the distinctly Lutheran education that we provide. At the same time, part of our philosophy of Lutheran education will be based on sanctified human judgment and reason as we apply scriptural principles in our setting and time. In other words, our understanding and commitment to biblical principles will be the same in all schools as we carry out educational ministry, but our application of those principles may be applied in different ways in different places. We will hold each other to a commitment to the former; we will evangelically and lovingly allow flexibility and freedom in the latter.

Lutheran schools are a part of the ministry of the church

WELS has historically taught that what takes place in our schools is clearly a part of the gospel ministry. It is gospel ministry because the use of the means of grace is central to all that our schools do. Lutheran Christian education is centered in the gospel and in the proclamation of Christ and what he did and does for us.

Men and women who are called into this means of grace ministry are ministers of the gospel, even though the scope of their call is more limited and narrower than that of the pastor. *This We Believe* states it clearly:

We believe that God has also established the public ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11), and it is the will of God that the church, in accordance with good order (1 Cor. 14:40) call qualified individuals into this public ministry (1 Tim. 3:1-10; 1 Cor. 9:14) . . . These individuals are the called servants of Christ and ministers of the gospel . . . We believe that the church has the freedom to establish various forms within the one ministry of the Word, such as pastors, Christian teachers, and staff ministers. Through its call, the church in Christian liberty designates the place and scope of service.

What makes the church *the church* is the faithful proclamation of Christ (in both law and gospel) through means of grace. Since the very purpose of our Lutheran schools is to bring Christ to our students, Lutheran education is by its very nature and definition a part of the ministry that God has entrusted to his church. While there is no denying that some of the education that takes place in our schools is not in itself the proclamation of Christ (in subjects such as mathematics or geography), it is true that this gospel proclamation lies at the foundation of what takes place in our schools and permeates all instruction. Since our schools deliver Christ to our students, the education carried out is *Christian* education, and it is part of the ministry of the church.

Of course, Christian education does not take place only in Lutheran Schools. It also takes place, using the same means of grace, as parents bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord, in home schools operated by parents, and in various programs carried out by congregations.

The gospel is delivered by called and trained teaching ministers

Since Lutheran education is a part of the ministry of the church, and since that ministry delivers the means of grace to people, that ministry will be carried out by individuals who have been thoroughly trained and then called to their field of service by the church. (See Augsburg Confession XIV: “No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called [*rite vocatus*].”)

The type and scope of training for called teaching ministers is determined by the church and its needs. The synod declares that someone is qualified to serve in this ministry by a process of certification, which publicly affirms that the individual called has received the necessary theological and professional training. It is for this reason that our synod governs, maintains, and supports Martin Luther College to carry out such training. Even when a teacher is trained at another institution, Martin Luther College is entrusted with overseeing the process in which any training that is lacking is provided by various means.

The mission of our schools is the same; the identity may be different

Over the past few decades, WELS has seen a shift in its philosophy of ministry in our schools. From early on, WELS decided that Christian education was an important part of the mission of the church. Its primary focus was on the Christian education of member children. Discipleship of WELS children was the goal.

In the second half of the 20th century, another element was adopted by many of our schools. Schools were not only for the education and discipleship of WELS children; they began to be viewed as opportunities for evangelism and outreach to the unchurched and to nominal Christians inactive in their own churches. The results of this shift in emphasis

have been mixed, with some congregations experiencing tangible results of their efforts in increased adult confirmations of parents with children enrolled in their schools. Other congregations have experienced limited gains through the enrollment of mission prospects. It should be said that even when our schools do not result in added adult confirmations, the gospel is still being delivered to students, and God blesses that gospel proclamation as he determines.

More recently, many schools have expanded their efforts to serve not only WELS members and mission prospects (the unchurched and inactive) and now serve Christian families that belong to and are active in other Christian denominations. The intent of this is not to proselytize but rather taking the opportunity to share the gospel and Lutheran doctrine with those who entrust their children to us for Christian education.

Still more recently, some schools have adopted as their mission to serve primarily as a compassion ministry, offering Lutheran education as a means to be a blessing to parents, students, and communities in general.

Congregations need to remember the ministerial purpose of our schools

Our shared philosophy of Christian education maintains that none of these approaches or identities are right or wrong in themselves. As long as the gospel is delivered faithfully, all are valid expressions of sound Lutheran education. The Lutheran school does not exist to offer private education solely as an alternative to public education. Nor should the school exist primarily to provide financial support for the congregation and its various ministries and programs. Rather, its sole reason for existence is that it is a part of the mission of the church and as a means to deliver Christ and his Word.

Careful and wise stewardship of funding resources

In cases where congregations have adopted tuition-based models in their schools, there is always the danger that schools will become financially dependent on tuition revenue to operate well or even to survive. Congregations need to carefully and prayerfully consider how congregational support as well as revenue from tuition will affect their educational ministries. Care should be taken not to become dependent on revenue outside of offerings to expand facilities or to carry out other congregational programs. Congregations should always have contingency plans in place if other sources of revenue decrease or disappear altogether.

Careful and wise stewardship of people resources

As our schools have grown (due to increased desires to avoid public schools and the availability of parental choice programs), and as the number of teaching candidates from

Martin Luther College has decreased, we are faced with an increasing shortage of qualified and trained teachers. Vacancies in the teaching ministry are at historic highs. This will have a number of practical implications as we plan for the future.

First, we will make every effort to recruit and encourage WELS young people to train for the teaching ministry. The synod, along with Martin Luther College, is already exploring ways to increase recruitment efforts in WELS congregations, schools, and homes.

Second, we recognize that, given our shortage of teachers, other sources of teachers can and should be considered. Teachers who have stepped out of the teaching ministry for family or other reasons will be encouraged to return. WELS teachers who have been trained at schools other than Martin Luther College will be encouraged to consider teaching in a WELS school and will be provided with a path toward WELS teaching certification. WELS members trained for other professions will be given the opportunity to become WELS teachers through a Competency Based Education program. While we do not want to lose the residency component at Martin Luther College, we can and should explore ways in which at least part of the college level instruction can be delivered through online education. In other words, our philosophy of Christian education means that we will dedicate ourselves to exploring all ways to provide trained WELS people for the teaching ministry.

Our rapid growth and lack of candidates has led some congregations to consider making use of non-WELS teachers in their schools. We believe that this should be done only as a means of last resort. And, if it is done, there needs to be an assurance that the non-WELS teacher is to be hired (rather than called) and is to be used only in ways that do not involve means of grace ministry. The congregation should also be assured that the non-WELS teacher or teacher's assistant has a full understanding of our doctrine and is committed not to do anything that will undermine that doctrine.

Consider how staffing decisions and approach to growth impacts the wider kingdom

As Lutheran schools shift from discipleship-only and mission/outreach-only models and enroll more students belonging to other Christian denominations, the need for teachers has expanded dramatically. This shift has taken place as a result of the expansion of parental choice programs on the one hand, and as a result of conscious decisions to enroll more non-WELS students regardless of whether they are mission prospects or members of other churches. We have also experienced an expansion in the number of schools that are primarily intended to be compassion ministries, serving for the benefit of communities and their families.

As the supply of teachers decreases and school enrollments rise, schools are facing more difficulties in securing WELS-trained teachers for their classrooms. Some have concluded that this continued growth is not sustainable in the long run. Martin Luther College has expanded opportunities for non-MLC-trained WELS teachers to achieve synodical teaching certification. It has also established an alternative pathway program to provide college graduates who are not trained as teachers to gain the skills needed to teach in our schools and to achieve teaching ministry certification. The synod has also ramped up efforts to recruit high school aged students to enroll in Martin Luther College.

We will agree that the four models of Lutheran education (member only; members and mission prospect; members, mission prospects, members of non-WELS churches; and compassion-based) all have their place. No single model is the correct one, and no model is illegitimate so that it should not be done.

But as we struggle to provide teachers, every congregation should consider the wider impact on our Lutheran schools when making enrollment decisions. Some questions that need to be asked and answered: If our school or pre-school exists as a mission opportunity, what well-defined system do we have in place to bring mission families into our congregations (a harvest strategy)? If our school is not bringing mission prospects into our congregation, should we consider changing the model of our school to more of a discipleship model? If the growth of our school requires hiring non-WELS teachers for non-means of grace duties, what plans do we have in place to ensure that these teachers do not negatively impact the Lutheran character of our schools? In providing teaching candidates through assignment or through the call process, to what degree should the Conference of Presidents consider whether a school is fulfilling its designed purpose?

Conclusions

- We will recognize that there is no single model that is right or wrong in itself. What one congregation decides to do with the model of Christian education may not be what another congregation decides. We will be brotherly and charitable as we consider another congregation's approach to Christian education.
- We want to preserve the Lutheran character of our schools and not give in to the temptation of operating merely private schools in which the gospel is no longer delivered and central to the school's ministry. A well-trained Lutheran faculty or teachers who are brought into the Lutheran church are the primary ways to preserve the Lutheran character of our schools.
- Teachers not of our fellowship will not do means of grace ministry. We do embrace the opportunity to instruct non-WELS teachers and staff and to minister to them.

- If children of non-WELS Christians are enrolled in our schools, a clear means should be in place to inform non-WELS families of what their children will be taught.
- Our congregations need to think carefully about the nature and purpose of our schools and see to it that church and school, pastors, and teachers, work faithfully to carry out that purpose.
- Our synod needs to redouble our efforts to recruit, train, and encourage WELS teachers who are zealous for the lost and who seek to shepherd those entrusted to their care.
- We will continue to pray, asking the Lord of the harvest to bless the gospel ministry in our schools and to provide workers needed to carry it out faithfully. We will continue to work together to steward the human resources that the Lord provides.

MN District Schools Coordinator

Minnesota District Council - November 3, 2025

Brothers in Christ,

It's a blessing to be with you today and to serve alongside you in our shared ministry across the Minnesota District. As your MN District Schools Coordinator, my role is to assist and support our schools, teachers, and congregations in carrying out their vital work of Christian education. I'm here to help in whatever way I can and I truly mean that.

I'm also blessed to serve alongside our MN District Early Childhood Coordinators, LaShawn Smith and Jamie Fischer. (Please get to know them if you haven't already.) Together, we met with all the other WELS District School and Early Childhood Coordinators at CLS this past September, where we began charting plans for this year's work.

This year, CLS selected the Minnesota District for a full round of school and ECM visits. We pray these visits were a blessing to you and your congregations. If you have feedback, whether positive or constructive, please don't hesitate to catch me today or send me an email. We want these visits to serve you well and strengthen your local ministries.

I also have a wonderful support team that helps serve the schools and congregations in our district:

- Jared Christensen – Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers Conference (MNDLTC)
- Eric Kaesermann – WELSAA Accreditation
- Macord Johnson – School Visitor Program
- Kelli Green & Angela Randall – Special Education Support
- Sam Nelson – School Law

Please feel free to reach out to any of us. We exist to serve you, your teachers, and your ministries. Many of the improvements in our district have come directly from your feedback and collaboration, and we want that dialogue to continue.

It's always a joy to gather with so many faithful servants of the gospel. Whether you serve in a large metro congregation or a small rural setting, your leadership and encouragement directly impact the ministry of our schools. Thank you for your ongoing partnership, your prayers, and your steadfast commitment to Christ-centered education.

A word of gratitude also goes to Melanie Giddings and her team for their leadership on the Theology Curriculum Project which is working on the new Religion Curriculum for PK-12. This is a major undertaking that will shape how our schools teach the truths of God's Word for years to come. The team is assembling writing teams this year and hope to have some finished products by the end of 2027. The high school curriculum is closer to 2030. If you have the time, thank Melanie and her team for the monstrous and important task they are working on.

Updates and Reminders

WELS Cloud Accounts

Please ensure that all teachers, staff ministers, and pastors in your congregations and schools have updated their WELS Cloud accounts, including biography and assessment information. These updates

are essential for accurate and efficient call list preparation. Please make sure principals are working with their staff to keep their Cloud Accounts up to date.

Accreditation

If your congregation operates a school that is not yet accredited, please encourage them to explore WELSSA or MNSAA Accreditation. Both offer excellent accountability and growth opportunities, and they demonstrate our commitment to quality Christian education.

Early Childhood Ministry (ECM)

For congregations with early childhood programs—or those considering starting one—please consider inviting “Telling the Next Generation” to your ministry. This program helps congregations develop a vision and a harvest strategy for reaching more families with the gospel. Contact the Synod offices if you’re interested.

Leadership Transition

Please join me in welcoming Mrs. Jamie Walta, who now serves as the WELS National Coordinator of Early Childhood Ministries, succeeding Cindi Holman upon her retirement. We thank God for Cindi’s years of faithful service and ask His blessing on Jamie as she steps into this important national role.

Consultation Support

If your school or congregation could benefit from help in curriculum planning, staffing, accreditation, or ministry strategy, please reach out to me or Jim Sievert at the Synod offices. We’re eager to serve your ministries and provide whatever guidance is helpful.

School Visitors Program

Macord Johnson (PLS) is working to revive the School Visitors Program, which pairs principals across our district for mutual encouragement and accountability. This peer support can be a tremendous blessing.

Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave Program

Begins **January 1, 2026**

- Funded by employee paycheck withholdings and employer contributions
- Called workers are exempt, though they may opt in voluntarily with the called worker doing ALL the work to opt into the program
- All other employees are required to participate, even if you only have one other employee who is only half time.
- Congregations with 30 or fewer non-called employees qualify for a lower contribution rate
- You must notify employees and post the required information by December 1, 2025
- Lawyer Sam Nelson is hosting a workshop on this material through MINNDEPENDENT on November 11, which is FREE for member schools or \$100 for Non-member schools.
 - <https://mindependent.org/seminars/>

Mindependent Advocacy

A heartfelt thank-you to Mindependent and President Tim Benz for their tireless advocacy this past year. When Governor Walz’s proposal threatened to cut nonpublic school funding, our pastors, teachers, staff ministers, principals, and families made their voices heard and it mattered. Your calls

and messages made a real difference. Please consider joining Minndependent to stay informed about legislation that affects our schools and the children we serve.

Brothers, thank you again for your leadership, prayers, and partnership in Christian education. The collaboration between our congregations, schools, and early childhood ministries is vital to our mission. Every sermon, every devotion, every parent conversation, and every moment you give to support our teachers and children is kingdom work.

May this time together encourage and refresh you for the ministry ahead. The Lord of the Church continues to bless our work together and I am so thankful to serve alongside you.

God bless your ministry,

Dave Gartner

dgartner@westlutheran.net

WELS Synodical Council
Meeting Summary – Spring 2025
April 25th & 26th

The Synodical Council met at the WELS Worship Center Friday and Saturday, April 25-26th. The meeting followed the traditional format. On Friday morning, the Plenary session was held which included the President's Report, a Special Presentation from an area of ministry and the Financial Update. 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

- Long Range Plan Update – Johnathan Hein presented the updated work on the Long-Range Strategic Plan (2025-2035). The long-range plan document includes the identification of 20 strategic objectives. The report and Pastor Hein's presentation identified the number one strategic issue facing the WELS is the loss of the young people demographic from the WELS (Ages 20-30 approximately)
- CFO Kyle Egan provided a summary of financial results. The Synod continues to be richly blessed by God through the generous giving of WELS members. CFO Egan reviewed the revised Capital Projects Planning Process and Policy which aims to provide greater discipline but also flexibility in the Capital Allocation Process

Ministry Committee Update

1. The Ministry Committee spent most of its time meeting with MLC President Gurgel and reviewing the findings from the Blueprint Schools' report
2. Several motions were made and approved. They included the following:
 - a. BME to engage with MLC and the Blueprint Schools Consultancy to identify strategies to produce as many called workers as possible
 - b. FY26 & FY27 ministry financial allocations were approved

Administrative Committee Update

1. 14 appointments/reappointments to various WELS Boards approved (WELS Investment Funds, Church Extension Fund, Retirement Program, VEBA Commission, NPH, Accounting Oversight Committee)
2. Church Extension Fund
 - a. CEF has an active portfolio of 194 loans, totaling \$210M in loan balances
 - b. The liquidity of the CEF is being closely monitored given the increase in borrowing costs in recent years
 - c. The CEF's overall balance of uncommitted funds is presently low
3. Church Giving Report

- a. CMO's remain strong. Through the first three months of 2025 (January - March), the total CMO was \$5.34M, which was 1.8 percent higher than the first three months of 2024
 - b. \$3.80M has been collected for 100 Mission in 10 years
4. Investment Balances
 - a. WELS Investment Funds net assets totaled \$333M as of March 31, 2025
 - b. WELS Foundation assets totaled \$204M as of March 31, 2025
5. WELS Pension Plan – Proposal was made and approved to payout a group of approximately 950 participants who have left WELS service and have a present value pension value of less than \$7K – the total cost of the payout is ~\$2.25M

Finance Committee Update

1. Approved FY25 plan modifications for Congregational Services, Home Missions, Communications, and MLC – total incremental spend of ~\$1.8M. No additional Synod Support was required
2. Approved FY26 & FY27 Ministry Financial Plan - \$121.1M and \$118.6M in expenditures respectively
3. Authorized the sale of residential triplex in New Ulm owned by MLC – estimated market value of \$375K per county records
4. Approved proposed changes to the WELS Capital Projects Planning and Approval Policy



Minnesota District
Mission Board

FALL 2025 UPDATE

September 15, 2025

Current Missions:

Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, MN (Cross-Cultural)

Immanuel Hmong, a cross-cultural mission in the heart of St. Paul, continues to actively reach the local Hmong community under the leadership of Pastor Pheng Moua, a dedicated missionary with a strong gift for teaching.

While Immanuel has shared space with St. John's in St. Paul, MN, the recent decision by St. John's to sell its property has renewed Immanuel's long-standing desire for a permanent home. With over 200 members, the congregation sees this as an opportunity to firmly establish their presence in the community. They are currently in discussions with Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran in Inver Grove Heights about purchasing its property, as that congregation has decided to close and sell.

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

San Juan celebrated its first five adult confirmations and now observes the Lord's Supper monthly. Ten new people are in Bible Information Class, including several new families, and Spanish service attendance has grown to 20-30 with a stronger core forming. English services remain steady at 50-60, with continued involvement in outreach ministries like ESL and Mommy & Me.

After nine months of discussion, St. John/San Juan chose not to merge with other Twin Cities urban churches. While the decision was difficult, the congregation is now focused on "right-sizing" its facility and ministry. Small group meetings have emphasized unity and mission, with hopes of moving into a more sustainable facility and re-energizing outreach for long-term urban and cross-cultural ministry.

We thank God for these blessings and trust His guidance for the future.

Risen Savior, North Liberty, IA (New Start)

In spring 2025, the former Good Shepherd multi-site in Cedar Rapids and North Liberty officially became two congregations, with the North Liberty campus now named **Risen Savior**. Around the same time, Pastor Lucas Callies accepted a call to Livonia, MI, creating a pastoral vacancy at Risen Savior.

Despite the vacancy, the congregation remains active and engaged in the community. They continue to host events, follow up with prospects, and show strong lay leadership. With weekly worship attendance of 40+, North Liberty remains a vibrant and promising mission field.

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

Beautiful Savior's most recent Bible Information Class included 10 people (5 members, 5 non-members). They anticipate receiving 3 new members in the coming months with another likely to join in early Fall.

After two years of strengthening our internal ministry, the congregation is now forming a Ministry Planning Team to focus on outreach opportunities in the coming years. With hundreds of new homes being built nearby—especially in Waukee—they see tremendous opportunities to share the gospel in our community.

God has also blessed the congregation with generous giving. A new fund for parking lot repairs has grown to \$18,000. In addition, the congregation has applied for a loan to help enable them to complete the much-needed parking lot repairs. (\$150,000 cost of full cement park lot required by the city). We thank the Lord for His blessings and look forward to how He will guide the outreach efforts in West Des Moines!

Faith, Prior Lake, MN (Mission Enhancement)

Faith was approved Spring 2024 for a mission enhancement to fund a part time staff minister. The congregation sold a portion of their property to New Creations, a childcare and preschool organization with several locations in the Twin Cities area. They built a preschool across the parking lot from the church. One condition of the sale was that Faith would be allowed to provide the religious curriculum. The owners of New Creations agreed, and the relationship has been strengthening over time.

Mr. Ric Gibson, a retired principal from St. Croix Lutheran Academy, as agreed serve as part time staff minister until December 2025, while the congregation is actively working on filling the position for the future.

Pastor Stephen Schmiel has continued to reach out and welcome the parents and to conduct chapel on a regular basis. With over 100 students enrolled at this location, there is a significant outreach opportunity for Faith. During this past year, a couple of the parents from the childcare facility have started to attend worship services. The congregation itself has also experienced recent increase of young families joining because of their increase mission focus on the community.

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

Salem in Greenfield and Cross in Rockford were granted unsubsidized mission status in Spring 2024. This has allowed them to continue working closely with the DMB through a transition in ministry approach. The two congregations merged into one multi-site ministry and joint worship services have begun in 2024. The vacancy for a third pastor has now been filled.

The congregation is planning an "The Everyone Outreach" event this Fall which has sparked a new level of outreach and evangelism awareness across both campuses. The congregation has been working on shaping community perception to reflect that we are for Christ, His Word, and people—not defined by what we're against. The focus is to re-engage the "dechurched" and inactive members while also reaching the unchurched in the community. The congregation looks to equip God's people to actively share their faith through training, encouragement, and modeling evangelism.

Saint Mark, Mankato, MN (New Enhancement)

Saint Mark was approved for a New Enhancement in Spring 2025. Saint Mark is a rapidly growing turn-around church that is reaching people new to the faith and young professionals. They continue to focus on their mission, core values and strategic plan and enhance what has already proven to bear fruit. Saint Mark has been blessed with continued significant growth. Their outreach efforts have impacted many unchurched people in the Mankato area and provided additional spiritual growth opportunities for current and new members.

Bible information classes for prospects, integrating new members into the congregation, and added programs require a significantly increased time commitment for pastoral and related care. They have tried to help keep up with growth by adding a part-time ministry coordinator in 2023 and a part-time worship coordinator in 2024. However, it was obvious that they need a new ministry management position to maintain our pace of growth. The New Enhancement includes the addition of a half-time Manager of Ministry in which will allow them to simultaneously continue the momentum they have in reaching Mankato while also discipling all the new members they have received. Currently, they have temporarily filled the part time position, and plan hire a longer-term resource in 2026.

New Missions Enhancement Requests (Spring 2026):

Faith, Excelsior, MN (New Enhancement)

Faith Lutheran Church of Excelsior, MN is located on the southwestern side of the Twin Cities metro area. The campus is right off highway 5 which is a main road through the southwestern side of the metro area. When the congregation started 50 years ago, it was serving a small rural community but now has turned into a booming metropolitan area with new homes and condos being built nearby and in the surrounding areas.

Faith's leadership realized that to better reach the unchurched and de-churched neighbors, they needed to make some dramatic change, and that's when they began to partner with NorthCross Lutheran in Lakeville. NorthCross mentored Faith to help them create a more welcoming culture focused on living out the principles outlined in Acts 2 of dedicating themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, meeting together regularly in each other's homes for small group Bible studies, and using their resources to bless the surrounding community.

Faith ministries are continuing to experience a season of exciting growth! Like a thriving business that recognizes the need to expand its team to serve a growing clientele, they believe it's time to invest in a full-time Worship and Youth Director who will continue to help them build a vibrant community of faith for generations to come. This key addition will allow them to reach more people for Jesus and continue to equip His people for ministry

Other Future Opportunities

Mt. Olive, Minneapolis, MN (Restart/New Enhancement?)

In spring 2025, the WELS Twin Cities urban congregations voted not to merge. Today, there are five churches with six congregations in the Twin Cities urban core: Pilgrim (Minneapolis), St. John's (Minneapolis), Mount Olive (St. Paul), St. John/San Juan (St. Paul), Immanuel Hmong (meeting at St. John/San Juan), and Divinity (St. Paul). Except for Immanuel Hmong, most of these congregations have experienced decades of decline, with average Sunday attendance between 40–80.

While the merger did not move forward, the Minnesota District Mission Board is now in early discussions with Mount Olive about a potential Restart/New Enhancement. Encouragingly, a core group has already formed across the urban congregations with a shared heart for mission.

Other congregations are also pursuing opportunities: Pilgrim is exploring Hispanic ministry, St. John's (Mpls) is considering a Restart/New Enhancement as they assess property challenges, St. John/San Juan has decided to sell their facility and seek a new location, and Divinity has recently filled its pastoral vacancy.

Though plans look different than expected, we trust God is at work and look forward to how He will use these congregations for His mission in the Twin Cities!

Additional Updates:

In July 2025, Dustin Sievert decided to step down from the Minnesota District Mission Board in order to focus on his primary ministry at St. Croix Lutheran Academy. The Minnesota District Mission Board has a new member, Brian Schmidt. Pastor Schmidt is based in West Des Moines, IA. Beautiful Savior in West Des Moines is a recent successful Restart. We are excited to leverage Pastor Schmidt's home mission background and excitement for the mission field!

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Stephen Schmiel (Chairman)

Rev. Robert Guenther

Rev. Mark Kaesmeyer

Rev. Brian Schmidt

Mr. Daryl Schultz

Mr. Glenn Schulz

Mr. Galen Holzhueter

WELS Commission on Evangelism Report to Conferences – Fall 2025

Everyone Outreach

More than 370 congregations have expressed interest in the program. 158 workshops have been held. Spring 2026 workshops are now being scheduled.

Learn more about *Everyone Outreach* at www.everyoneoutreach.com

Congregational Evangelism Kit

The *Congregational Evangelism Kit* provides video-based training for congregational evangelism leaders and teams. The *Congregational Evangelism Kit* is available at <https://welscongregationalservices.net>.

One by One

This Bible study is based on Pastor David Rosenau's keynote presentation at the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership in January of 2020. Using powerful personal stories and drawing from his wealth of experience both as a detective and a parish pastor, Pastor Rosenau helps Christians understand why it is so important to see every soul as a treasure and why we want to be willing to spend the time and effort necessary to share the gospel with each one.

One by One is available at <https://welscongregationalservices.net>

Let's Go!

This Bible study provides online, video-based personal witness training. It teaches a simple, three-part approach that any Christian can put into practice. 1) Love the unchurched people God has brought into your life. 2) Listen carefully to their thoughts, beliefs, concerns, etc. 3) Lead them to the gospel. *Let's Go* can be used by both large and small group Bible studies as well as by individual Christians.

Let's Go is available at <https://welscongregationalservices.net>

In Season and Out of Season

This Bible study, based on the Apostle Paul's evangelism experiences in the city of Philippi, seeks to encourage and equip God's people to share the gospel in any and every situation. The three-lesson, video-based bible study can be used in large or small group settings.

In Season and Out of Season is available at www.welscongregationalservices.net.

Outreach Newsletters

The Commission on Evangelism has offered *Outreach Newsletters* to WELS congregations for many years. The newsletters each consist of a devotional article targeted at congregations' prospects.

Note: Beginning in 2026, newsletters for specific years will no longer be produced. Rather, all newsletter series will be available on the Congregational Services website. Congregations can choose which series to use.

The newsletters can be downloaded, free of charge, at www.welscongregationalservices.net.

Come and See

Come and See will be a program congregations can use to encourage and equip members to invite unchurched people in their lives to connect to their congregation and to Christ using invitational evangelism. The COE plans to release the program in early 2026.

Serving alongside you,

Eric

Rev. Eric Roecker
Director, WELS Commission on Evangelism
eric.roecker@wels.net 414-256-3287

Minnesota District Worship Committee Report

District Council – November 3, 2025

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 Pastor Adam Mueller: More than Good Worship: Congregational Health. 2026: Craig Engel will present 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 many parts of the District. The intent is to host the Vigil once again in 2026.

Christian Worship Hymnal Suite

- *CW: Guidebook* is in the early stages of the 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* (downloadable choral alternates, lead sheets, modulations, and instrumental packs (SATB voices of pew edition settings in a variety of transpositions for instruments. New materials are added regularly at: online.nph.net/musicians-resource. Some of these resources will be used during the conference.

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 plans to work with the content development team for the new theology curriculum, incorporating resources for teaching Lutheran hymnody at all age levels. This collaboration will begin in 2025. The hymnology instructional materials published by NPH are available to congregations and schools who want to include hymnody instruction even before 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.
- 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.
- Carthage is unable to host the worship conference in June 2027 due to building projects. So we are giving strong consideration to holding worship conference in June 2027 at MLC.

Respectfully submitted,
Joel J. Gawrisch

DISTRICT DISCIPLESHIP REPORT

2026 District Workshop

I've reached out to St. Croix Lutheran Academy about open dates for the workshop in February/March. 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.

2026 Youth Rally Planning

Teens from across the country will gather at Bowling Green State University in Ohio July 14-17, 2026 for the next WELS Youth Rally. Posters and logos are available for publicity at www.welsyouthrally.net. Registration will begin in March.

Ongoing Resources – Most resources available at WELS Congregational Services website.

- **Direct email subscriptions:** *Marriage Moments, WELS Family Devotions, Transformed Teen Devotions*
- **WELS Youth Night:** Fall 2025 keynote & resources now available.
- **WELS Online National Teen Bible Study:** The first one of the year was held Sunday, Sept. 28th! The next one is scheduled for **Sunday, November 9th at 6 pm CST**. Led by Prof. David Scharf.
- **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.

NEW & COMING RESOURCES

- **Advent by Candlelight:** Several archived versions and a new service for 2025 at the WELS website.
- **"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 SERIES:** The 3rd installment of the 5-part stewardship series should be available soon. (Parts 1 & 2 on Time & Truth 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.
- **Marriage Enrichment Resource** (Coming in January): This video-based resource, built on the book of Ruth, is led by Prof. Mark Paustian. Four WELS couples at a retreat were recorded with the intent that couples can "attend" with them through videos, pause points, and discussion. The 5-part series includes participant and leader guides with potential use as Saturday workshops, retreats, or small group studies. Each session is 60-90 minutes long.

WELS DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

- WELS Discipleship is doing a survey of churches to help get a finger on the pulse of what churches are experiencing and what they most need. The survey takes only 3-4 minutes. If you haven't filled it out already, please complete it at: <https://forms.gle/DRA53a18qBG1UNzP9>



Minnesota District Special Ministries Annual Report

Highlights from Special Ministries Work in The MN District

- 1. WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired (MVI)** Since many people who are visually impaired are looking to audio resources, MVI continues offers audio recordings of *Meditations*, *Forward in Christ*, about half of The Peoples Bible commentaries, and other resources at listen.wels.net. MVI continues to add to the listen library. csm.welsrc.net/visually-impaired.
- 2. Ministry to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing-** The newest resource from MDHH is <https://gospelhands.net/> the first ever online dictionary of Christian religious signs. Also available on that page are weekly streamed signed services and sermons. An interpreter continues to help at the Jesus Cares Program at St. John's in Glencoe MN and our Joy in Jesus Camp.
- 3. Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry/Jesus Cares Ministry/Joy in Jesus Camps**—There continues to be a strong partnership between IDDM and JCM in the District. Twice a year in the first Semester and 2nd Semester, Joel Gaertner, Stephen Schmidt, and Patrick Feldhus continue to connect our future WELS Teachers and t our future Special Ed teachers from MLC to these ministries. A new program called SMILES is being developed and was promoted at conferences. There are 28 Jesus Cares programs in our District. The two “Joy in Jesus” Camps had 40 campers and 18 volunteers. We are planning for next year.
- 4. Committee on Mental Health Needs**-There is help available for those struggling with mental health issues. The MAP program connects our members to CFS councilors. Also there is our WELS/ELS Christian Therapists Network.
- 5. Prison Ministry**-The transition to merge Prison Ministry and Institutional Ministry is about complete. There is need of volunteers to correct tests and give encouragement to inmates. There is a continual need to help connect returning citizens with congregations.
- 6. Military Services** -There is a great partnership with Lutheran Military Support Group in our District. There are scholarships for anyone who is/was in the military and is looking to go into the ministry. There is a need to keep the referrals incoming and updated, especially with the constant movement of our military personnel.
- 7. OWLS**-Presented on Special Ministries, TLHA/Hope Residence, and JCM to local OLWS group.

Future Plans

- Continue the partnership between JCM and IDDM with presentations at MLC and the “Joy in Jesus” camps
- Continue promotion of Special Ministries in our District especially the ones that are centered in our District.
- Emphasize wels.net/referral for all areas of Special Ministries.
- Promote the MAP program in connection to CFS and promote WELS/ELS Christian Therapists Network

Pastor Patrick Feldhus, MN District Coordinator

Email: pfeldhus@hotmail.com

Cell Phone: (920)918-9949



MN District Reporter

The district email list consists of 451 subscribers; 218 pastors, 80 teachers, and most of the rest are lay men and women. Please submit news items either as text that is complete, proofread, and ready to go, or as a PDF document that is formatted to your liking. Circuit pastors are encouraged to invite pastors who are new to the district to subscribe to the list. Please also encourage all pastors in your circuits to invite their called workers and laypeople to subscribe. Here is a bulletin announcement you might use/modify:

MN District Email List...Keep up with what's going on in the Minnesota District of the WELS by subscribing to the district email list. Go to welsmn.org and click 'mailing list' at the top of the page to sign up.

Suggestions for improvement?

MN District Nominating Committee

The district nominating committee will prepare a slate of nominees for the 2026 MN District Convention elections. The positions that are up for election are shown below. If you know someone who is qualified to serve in a position and would like to put their name forward, please let me know by talk, text, or email.

	Current term ends	Can be re-elected?
<u>DISTRICT NOMINATING COMMITTEE</u>		
Chairman Rev. James Panning	2026	Y
Crow River Conference Rev. Greg Tobison Rev. Cody Hauch	2028 2028	
Mankato Conference Rev. Matt Rauh Rev. Micah Plocher	2028 2026	Y
MN River Valley Conference Rev. Ethan Boese Rev. Adam Manian	2026 2028	Y
Red Wing Conference Rev. Brian Kom N/A Rev. Dominick Olson	2028 2028	
St. Croix Conference Rev. James Roecker Rev. Daniel Walters	2028 2028	
Southern Conference Rev. Seth Georgson Rev. Roger Neumann (IA Circuit)	2028 2026	N
<u>MN DISTRICT MISSION BOARD</u>		
Chairman Rev. Steven Waldschmidt	2028	
Pastor Rev. Dustin Seivert Rev. Mark Kaesmeyer Rev. Robert Guenther	2026 2028 2028	Y

Layman

Mr. Galen Holzhueter	2028	
Mr. Daryl Schultz	2026	Y
Mr. Glenn Schultz	2028	

MN DISTRICT BOARD OF APPEALS**Chairman**

Rev. Daniel Lindner	2026	N
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Pastor

Rev. Craig Engel	2028	
Rev. Roger Rockhoff	2026	Y
Rev. Dan Balge	2026	N

Teacher

Mr. Stephen Gurgel	2028	
Mr. Heath Dobberpuhl	2026	Y
Mr. Mark Kutz	2026	Y

Layman

Mr. Dale Peterson	2028	
Mr. Brad Kletcher	2026	Y
Pres. em. Dan Bruss, Ph. D.	2026	Y

INDIVIDUAL MN DISTRICT POSITIONS**Discipleship Coordinator**

Rev. Ryan Wolfe	2028	
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Evangelism Coordinator

Stephen J. Meyer	2028	
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Parish Schools/Lutheran Schools

Teacher David Gartner	2028	
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Special Ministries

Rev. Patrick Feldhus	2028	
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Worship

Rev. Joel Gawrisch	2028	
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Synod Council Representative

Mr. Curt Sames	2026	Y
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SYNOD POSITIONS

In 2026, the Minnesota District is responsible for electing:

- A Teacher for the MLC Governing Board. Current representative Paul Kelm is eligible for re-election.
- A Pastor for the MLC Governing Board. This replaces Layman Michael Valleau.
- A Layman for the WLS Governing Board. Current representative Clayton Raasch is eligible for re-election.

James Panning
james.a.panning@gmail.com
talk/text: (702) 237-9272

District Council -- November 3, 2025 – MCG Summary Report

Minnesota District:

Reports that are received from the synod offices are forwarded to each congregation.

Reminders regarding Congregation Mission Offering Subscriptions and Statistics are sent to each congregation on an “as needed” basis. It was noted that the CMO remittance deadline for the final 2024 offerings is January 8, 2026 while deadline for the 2026 CMO subscriptions and the 2025 Statistics is February 6, 2026.

Each chairman has access to reports that note both those subscriptions that have been sent in and those that have not. A video, “Doing More Together,” reflecting on the blessings of the past 175 years can be used as a motivational tool for CMOs by congregations.

Notes from the Synod Office:

CMO 2025 remittance through August has been **\$14.87 million** which is \$142,000 more than the CMO for the same period in 2024.

Through September 4th we’ve received 978 gifts from 956 individuals/groups totaling \$168,328 for the WELS 175th Anniversary thank offering.

Additional resources are available at: mcg.welsrc.net

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Roger Rockhoff

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) Director's Report
September 2025

1. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO)

January-September 2025	\$16,911,304	2.3% increase from 2024
January-September 2024	\$16,528,912	2.0% increase from 2023

	Active congregations asked to remit CMO 2025 gifts*	CMO non-contributors as of 10/7/25	No gifts to WELS as of 10/7/25
2025	1,164	118	112

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

Kurt's observations: In joyful response to our Savior's love for them, our churches offered Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) of \$2.04 million in September 2025 for Christ's gospel work through our synod. This total is 13.4 percent (\$241,000) higher than September 2024 CMO. On a calendar year-to-date basis through September (nine months), CMO totaled \$16.91 million, 2.3 percent (\$382,000) higher than the first nine months of 2024 and 2.6 percent (\$434,000) higher than projected 2025 receipts. God be praised for continuing to bless us through his people's generous gifts! Churches can learn more about the impact of their offerings at wels.net/annualreport.

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 annual distributions continue to increase. 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 Sept. 30, 2025

Endowment Funds	December 2006-2024	2025 through 8/31/2025	Cumulative Totals	Expectancies
WELS Min Education	9,316,249	824,220	10,140,469	12,683,702
MLC	4,150,802	360,478	4,511,280	13,860,983
MLS	539,513	45,485	584,998	117,206
WLS	2,631,106	227,347	2,858,453	15,619,447
LPS	997,651	84,170	1,081,821	512,841
WELS Mission	15,782,689	1,319,622	17,102,311	15,841,394
Home Missions	1,594,147	294,120	1,888,267	17,602,690
World Missions	5,260,202	468,536	5,728,738	10,506,053
Total	40,272,359	3,623,979	43,896,338	86,744,316

<u>Distributions*</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>
WELS Min Education	255,496	274,136	299,760	323,001
MLC	136,233	142,408	151,695	155,766
MLS	17,415	17,887	18,779	19,392
WLS	87,239	90,377	95,662	98,470
LPS	32,671	33,932	36,022	37,208
WELS Mission**	494,985	520,783	559,298	583,437
Home Missions	39,419	44,641	50,732	55,554
World Missions	126,793	133,858	149,623	167,818
Total	1,190,251	1,258,022	1,361,571	1,440,646

*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 new WELS Mission Endowment Fund.

3. WELS 175th anniversary offering

Ministry of Christian Giving is coordinating a special offering to celebrate WELS' 175th anniversary. In July, each congregation received a package in the mail containing flyers that could be inserted into bulletins. This insert (also available in [electronic format](#)) reviews the blessings of our synod's history, looks ahead to our next big goals according to the synod's long-range (ten-year) strategic plan, and provides the opportunity to give. (Congregations needing extra inserts can order them at nph.net.) So far, the synodwide offering totals \$186,987. Learn more and donate at welshistoricalinstitute.org/175th-offering.

4. 100 Missions in 10 Years

Ministry of Christian Giving worked with WELS Home Missions through June 2024 to encourage gifts for the "100 Missions in 10 Years" synodwide campaign that was approved at the 2021 WELS convention. 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 4,374 gifts/commitments from 2,223 individuals/groups totaling \$4.06 million. God be praised!

5. LPS Music Center

MCG is partnering with Luther Preparatory School, WELS Chief Financial Officer Kyle Egan, and consulting firm Generis on a capital campaign to build a new music center on the Watertown campus. During the quiet phase, we are inviting interested WELS donors to offer major gifts or commitments for the project. To date, we've received gifts, commitments, and LPS reserves/events income totaling \$7.7 million towards the \$16 million project. If you (or others whom you know) would like to learn more about this initiative, please contact us at mcq@wels.net or go to lps.wels.net/magnify. We trust that our Lord will bless us through his generous people.

6. WELS Gifts/Bequests for the Fiscal Year

Unrestricted:	25-26	\$ 2,180,704	Sept 30, 2025
	24-25	\$11,186,236	
	23-24	\$13,125,167	
	22-23	\$ 9,821,647	
	21-22	\$14,953,832	

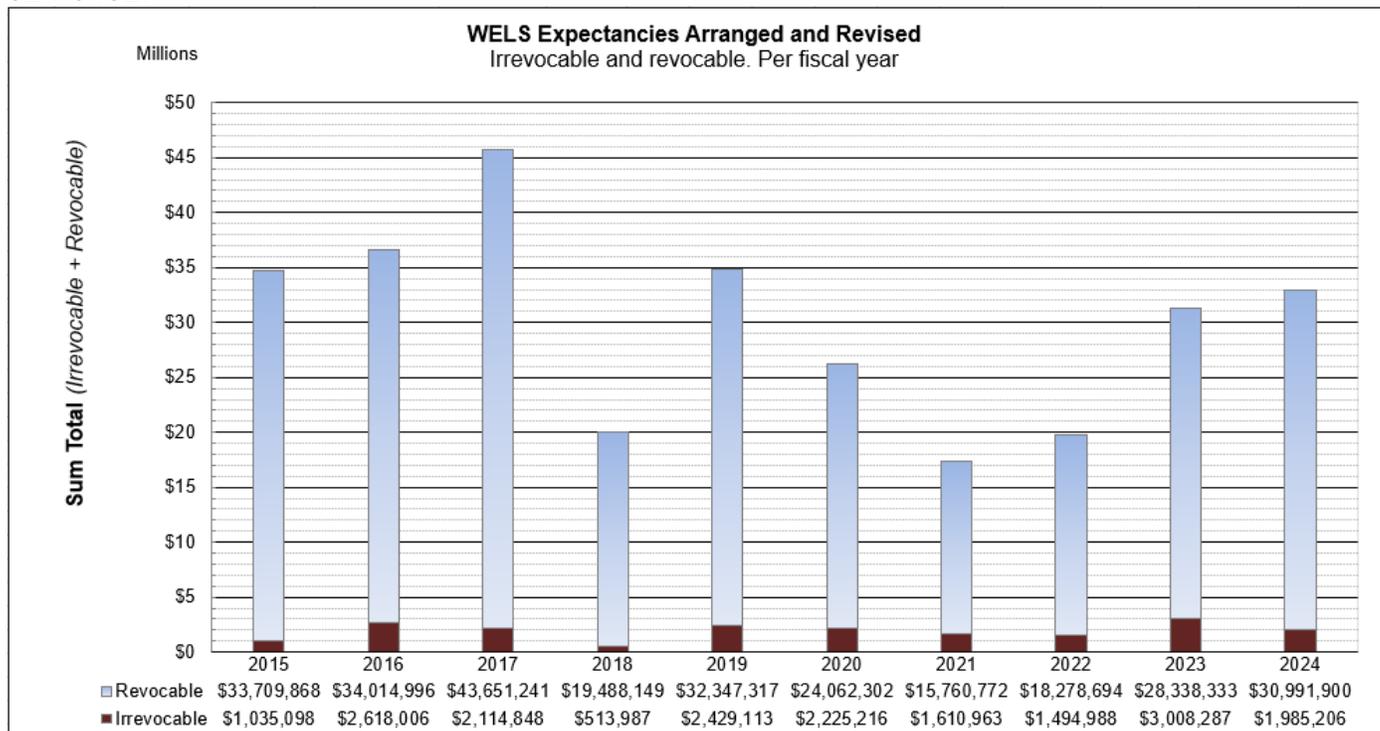
Temporarily Restricted: 25-26 \$ 4,338,780 Sept 30, 2025
 24-25 \$22,101,953
 23-24 \$17,312,326
 22-23 \$17,964,617
 21-22 \$17,022,713

Permanently Restricted: 25-26 \$ 883,573 Sept 30, 2025
 24-25 \$ 3,117,035
 23-24 \$ 4,134,221
 22-23 \$ 2,691,059
 21-22 \$ 2,549,014

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 a congregational planned giving program (number 14 below) by calling 414-256-3209/800-827-5482.

7. 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 **\$10.8 million in new and revised deferred expectancies** from July 1-October 9, 2025. If your congregation would like to learn more about **Christian estate planning** and the resultant gifts that will benefit your ministry, please call your area's deferred CGC (wels.net/givingcounselors) or phone our office at 414-256-3209/800-827-5482.



8. Charitable Gift Annuity Appeal

Each September, we mail a charitable gift annuity (CGA) appeal, sponsored by WELS Foundation, to certain WELS members in our database who are age 60+. We thank WELS Foundation for offering this unique giving tool that enables WELS members to arrange ministry distributions and personal income payments.

9. IRA Charitable Distribution Opportunity

IRA charitable distributions provide a unique giving opportunity for anyone 70.5 or older to direct qualified charitable distributions to WELS ministries from their IRA accounts. 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.

10. Donor-Advised Funds Gifts and Distributions

Gifts into WELS Foundation Donor-Advised Funds

25-26	\$ 303,436	Sept 30, 2025
24-25	\$3,116,732	
23-24	\$1,473,051	
22-23	\$1,829,215	
21-22	\$ 6,993,465	

<u>DAF Distributions</u>	<u>to WELS Funds</u>	<u>to WELS Synod Schools</u>	<u>to WELS Endowments</u>	<u>to Cong & Agencies</u>	
25-26	\$ 586,677	\$ 27,000	\$ 81,100	\$ -0-	\$ 478,577
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
21-22	\$1,722,141	\$ 150,373	\$124,179	\$ -0-	\$1,447,589

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

October – WELS long-range plan: Congregations

November – WELS long-range plan: Calling

December – WELS long-range plan: Commission

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 November 2025 issue focuses on donor-advised funds, gifts of appreciated assets, and year-end donation tips. You can read *Grace of Giving* online at wels.net/graceofgiving.

13. Stewardship Programs

WELS Discipleship released the second part of a multi-year congregational stewardship emphasis called *Stewardship Legacy*. This program seeks to stress the “whole life” approach to stewardship, including our time, talents, treasures, temple (our bodies), and God’s Truth. The second part of this program, *Beautiful Truth*, along with the first component, *A Time for Everything*, is available at welscongregationalservices.net. 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. Congregational Planned Giving Program

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving’s congregational planned giving program manual helps congregations promote planned giving opportunities to members. It also provides guidance on starting an endowment for long-term ministry support as well as setting up a planned giving committee. The manual and related resources are available at wels.net/plannedgivingprogram.

Kurt’s observations: I encourage congregational leaders to review this program and implement its ideas to help God’s people better plan gifts both now and at life’s end.

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. Our next session will be held January 12-16, 2026. If you are interested in attending, contact karen.martinez@wels.net.

16. Personnel Changes

In early October, WELS Conference of Presidents called Rev. Michael Ewart to serve as the deferred Christian giving counselor in the Northern Wisconsin District. We pray that our Lord Jesus will guide Pastor Ewart’s call deliberations for the good of Christ’s kingdom and the benefit of his precious people.

Reuben Schmitz, WELS prospect analyst, will retire in early February 2026. We thank our Lord for the five years of faithful service Reuben has provided. We ask God to bless Nancy and him throughout their retirement years! Lord-willing, we’ll identify Reuben’s successor soon.



Minnesota District Legislation Committee



Report to the MN District Council– November 2025

Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave

Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFMLA) is a new law that goes into effect January 1, 2026. It is intended to provide workers with wage replacement during an extended family or medical leave. It is different from Earned Sick and Safe Time, which became effect in January of 2024. Under the Earned Sick and Safe Time law, employees accrue paid time off (PTO) at a rate of one hour for every 30 hours worked and can earn up to 48 hours each year. Employees can use this PTO for family or medical short-term leaves (7 days or less). MPFML is intended for extended leaves lasting at least 7 days. Employees are eligible for a maximum of 12 weeks of family leave per year, 12 weeks of medical leave, or a combination of the two not exceeding 20 weeks. Employers are required to start withholding the employee share of the premium (.44% of salary) and submit that along with the employer share (.22% of the salary of each qualifying employee) to the state on January 1, 2026. Employers may choose to provide this coverage through private insurance instead of through the state. Here are some of the specific details regarding MPFML:

W2-FICA Employees (Non-Clergy or Clergy Taxed Under FICA)

- All W2-FICA employees, full and part-time, are automatically covered under PFMLA and must be included in your plan.

W2-SECA Employees (Clergy and Teachers Taxed Under SECA)

- These individuals are considered self-employed under state law. They are excluded from automatic coverage but may choose to opt in under the State Plan.

W2-SECA clergy who wish to participate should understand, based on present guidance:

1. They must use the State Plan.
2. They are responsible for enrolling in the state plan by January 1 and are responsible for paying the full annual premium (both employee and employer shares).
3. They must commit to at least two years of participation.

Next Steps for Ministries

- Implement PFMLA for W2-FICA Employees. You may use either the State Plan or a Private Plan through an approved carrier. Private Plans must meet or exceed the State Plan's benefits, though premiums may differ. Some quotes will be lower, some the same, and others higher than the state rate. Even if slightly higher, we encourage you to consider a Private Plan during Paid Leave rollout. You will get the benefit of a call center to support you with guidance on implementation, enrolling, claims management, and compliance.
- Using the State Plan
To use the State Plan, visit the Minnesota Paid Leave website, which offers videos, documents, FAQs, and a contact form. Thus far, responses through the form arrive within 24 hours, and phone wait times remain short (expected to increase by January 2026).
- Exploring a Private Plan
Create a census using the one attached of all full-time and part-time W2-FICA employees (do not include any W2-SECA) and submit your census to a private insurance carrier. (Possible contact: Mark Santelman at MLSantelman@Gmail.com., 507-217-1554.
- Employee Notifications: two types required
By December 1, post the Minnesota-approved PFMLA worksite poster in common areas accessible to employees. Posters are available on the Paid Leave website.

By December 1, document that you privately communicated to each W2-FICA employee the benefits available through Paid Leave—either by email or in a group meeting with an attendance sheet.
- Communicating with W2-SECA Called Workers
Inform them of their right to opt in directly through the State Plan. To maintain good order, ministries may wish to have Called Workers sign a waiver form acknowledging that they understand it is their responsibility to take action if they wish to enroll.

Minnesota District Legislation Committee: Nate Kallies, Rev. Ed Lehmann, Rev. Martin Bentz

Minnesota District Constitution Committee

Rev. David Peters, chairman

Rev. Robert Harting

Mr. Bradley Kletscher, Esq.

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

Dear Brothers in Christ Jesus:

November 3, 2025

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 very important! They 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.

Formatting Instructions

Our committee has been using the current *Model Constitution and Bylaws of the WELS (1997)* as a tool for suggesting well thought out wording as part of our critique. Now that the Conference of Presidents has issued two new models (named *Model A* and *Example B*), we will be working with those as well — especially since some congregations have already been trying out several of the ideas contained therein. We want to be sure that your congregation or organization has carefully thought through your proposed methods and language, and that your submission is consistent with God's Word, with our confessions, with our synod's and district's *Constitution and Bylaws*, with the laws of your state, and with the experience of others who have used the same or similar methods and language. Sharing the wisdom seems wise.

On the other hand, using the bylaws from other congregations whose documents did receive approval from our committee years ago, or even from a constitution committee in another district, is not a wise strategy since changes in personnel tend to import changes in editorial approaches and evaluations as to what should be approved and what should not. Nevertheless, uniformity around our synod is obviously to be desired, and the twelve constitution committee chairmen will continue working to achieve that. Sticking with the language found in the officially approved models is the best way to assure that our congregations are all walking together in these matters.

All of our synod's model constitution and bylaws documents — including the “old one” from 1997 — aim to involve men and women in as much Gospel ministry as possible, while at the same time honoring the biblical principles of God-given male and female roles. In each document the term “oversight” indicates the exercise of “binding authority.” (What kind of authority is not binding?) We have been told that “manage” or “management” indicate a performance of tasks or services without the exercise of any real authority. This brings up the question “Doesn't a manager have any real authority?” Not all questions have been answered. The CoP continues to study these matters on our behalf. I encourage you to trust their leadership.

Both *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.
- ☞ **Example B** is intended for larger congregations in which a consensus building approach would be too cumbersome.

Digital files of *Model A* and of *Example B*, with and without explanations, can be downloaded from the “Resources” tab on our www.welsmn.org district website.

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 RTF format. Some of you will be pleased to know that we are now able to work with DOC and DOCX files! We also work with PDF, RTF, WPD, 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.

Concerning Dissolution and the “IRS Code of 1954”

Many of our churches' constitutions cite “the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Code” – or words to that effect. Very good – except that that 1954 Code was rewritten and renamed by Congress in 1986. The 1954 Internal Revenue Code, as amended, was specifically renamed the “Internal Revenue Code of 1986” by section 2 of the Tax Reform Act of 1986, and was signed by President Ronald Reagan.¹ However, our synod's 1997 *Model Constitution and Bylaws* (Article XI, Section 2) says: “... the Internal Revenue Code of 1994 or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Code.” The new *Model A* and *Example B* mentioned above have repeated this mistake. However, that 1994 code does not exist (except in Puerto Rico)! I have pointed this out to the appropriate synod officials several times, and President Schroeder recently said that he'd “make a note of it.” Please be sure that your congregation gets it right, or we won't approve your document!

We urge you: Change that date in your constitution from “1954” to “1986, as amended,” You will be bringing your church's constitution up to date in accordance with Public Law 99-514, §2, Oct. 22, 1986, 100 Stat. 2095 of the United States Code, Article 26.2.² You do not need to run that change through our committee because you will simply be obeying the law of the land. Even if everyone else gets it wrong, you will sleep better at night knowing that at least you got it right!

Thank you for the privilege of involving our committee in this portion of the ministry being done by your congregation. May our risen Redeemer continue to bless all of our labors in his name!

With you in Christ's service,

Rev. David Peters, chairman

PastorPeters87@AOL.com

(262) 880-5951

¹ “Tax Reform Act of 1986.” *Merriam-Webster.com Legal Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/Tax%20Reform%20Act%20of%201986>. Accessed Oct. 31, 2022. Cf. also Wikipedia contributors, “Internal Revenue Code,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Internal_Revenue_Code&oldid=1115554749. Accessed Oct. 31, 2022.

² <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title26&edition=prelim>. Last visited Mar. 15, 2025.