

**TOGETHER**



August 21, 2018

## **WELS ministerial education schools begin another year**

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**T**he four WELS ministerial education schools opened their years with blessings and good news.

While class sizes remain in the 20s and 30s for the next two years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., projections based upon planned graduates from Martin Luther College indicate an upward trend toward the mid-30s in the following years. The Lord is answering the need for more workers in his harvest field.

Preliminary undergraduate opening enrollment at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., as of mid-August, is 768 compared to 756 last year. (Official enrollment is finalized at the end of August.) About 200 of the undergraduates are preseminary students, 70 of which are freshmen. Total enrollment in the various educational tracks is 547. Eleven students are enrolled in the staff ministry program.

Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., opened the school year with a total enrollment of 420, up from 416 last year. Enrollment has been steady over the last five years, significantly larger than the low of 333 ten years ago. Last year LPS sent the largest number of its graduates to MLC to train for the pastoral ministry (38) in its 153-year history. Seventy percent of the class of 2018 has enrolled at Martin Luther College.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., begins the school year under the leadership of its new president, Rev. Mark Luetzow. Opening enrollment is 192, slightly lower than last year's 195. MLS has 14 international students from five countries (Canada, South Korea, China, Germany, and Mexico). Thirty-three percent of the MLS faculty (including dormitory staff) is new since the end of last school year.

We thank God for these schools and for their students who are preparing to serve the Lord in the public ministry.

Serving in Christ,  
President Mark Schroeder 

## New WELS high school opens

On Aug. 8, a new WELS high school began its first school year. Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School (KPLHS) is serving young men from Milwaukee County, most of whom qualify for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, a government school voucher system.

“There is a huge mission field right here in Milwaukee,” says Mr. Kevin Festerling, the school’s founder and principal. “Hundreds of students graduating from WELS grade schools in the area could not pursue Christian secondary education due to the scarcity of voucher seats available in the existing area Lutheran high schools. I felt like we as a church were turning our back on the Great Commission by turning students away who wanted a Christian education.”

Festerling recognized that building a Lutheran high school to serve this new group of students’ needs wouldn’t be easy. The school has deliberately focused on providing young men with a kingdom-first mindset. The statistics are grim for boys who are raised in urban areas in the United States, and Milwaukee’s statistics are even worse than most. According to Festerling, many young men in today’s families are navigating the most critical years of their lives without active fathers. To help reverse that trend and build Christian leaders, Kingdom Prep’s vision is for “young men to develop their God-given gifts to lead in the home, serve in the church, engage in meaningful work, and transform community.”

Daily small-group Bible studies focus on what it means for a man to seek God’s heart with his whole life. Assigned projects help the young men solve real community problems with godly solutions. School decisions are placed in the hands of student leaders. Each facet of the school is focused on helping it accomplish its mission of “building a brotherhood in Christ for lives of purpose.”


Rev. Dr. Paul Steinberg, executive director of Chaplains in Schools and one of Kingdom Prep’s spiritual advisors, is helping the school’s leadership maintain its focus on its mission to disciple the next generation of Christian male leaders. He says, “My work will be to spiritually assess each of the freshmen and connect them with a strong Christian mentor. Kingdom Prep students and their mentors will aim to meet weekly for spiritual check-ins, prayer, and Bible study.”

In 2018-19, Kingdom Prep is serving 60 freshmen boys. Each school year, a grade will be added, along with space for 60 more boys. Each Kingdom Prep student is invited to commit to the school’s mission, carrying the KPLHS vision through brotherhood in Christ and hard work.

“We are there to walk alongside the brothers as they grow,” says Festerling, “celebrating the way each takes responsibility for his own growth.”

Mr. Jim Rademan, director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools, notes, “The Christian love and commitment of the called teachers and staff, led by founding principal Kevin Festerling, is clear. The teachers

are sharing with the students the power of the Holy Spirit and the opportunity they have to learn the skills to be leaders in their homes and community.”

For more information on Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, visit [kplhs.org](http://kplhs.org). The October issue of *Forward in Christ* magazine will also share comments from students in Kingdom Prep’s first freshman class. 

## VEBA rate increase lower than expected

WELS Benefit Plans announced that the VEBA health plan rates are increasing by two percent for 2019; this is a significantly lower increase than initially projected. Over the past three years the VEBA health plan rates have increased by an average of 6.6 percent, and budget forecasts are usually estimated at around ten.

A two percent increase is far better than expected, says Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of Benefit Plans. He explained that in today’s market, cost increases for many other employer group health plans have been in the five to eight percent range over the past few years. Rate increases for many health insurance plans available to individuals, such as those on public exchanges, have recently been ten percent or higher.


Peterman says one major factor in the lower-than-expected increase is better

utilization of benefits by members. “We want to pass that savings back to the local ministries in the form of a lower increase,” he says. As VEBA members use medical care more efficiently and are, in general, healthier, the reduced health care costs are shared throughout the synod.

With the rate increase lower than planned for, it is the hope that calling bodies that use WELS VEBA will find a bit of a budget surplus that could be reallocated for ministry or other local needs. As an example of savings, for a family plan in Wisconsin, the difference between a two percent increase and a ten percent increase ranges from approximately \$1,500 to \$2,200 per year.

Peterman says, “It’s a blessing to be able to provide reliable, comprehensive medical coverage for our workers across the country so they can focus on their ministry and sharing the gospel. Providing this coverage at rates that are stable over time and as low as reasonably possible allows us to support calling bodies and help them achieve their ministry plans.”

This fall, VEBA will hold a limited open enrollment from Nov. 1–30, 2018. Eligible called and lay workers at calling bodies already participating in VEBA will be able to either enroll in or change their benefits.

To learn more about WELS Benefit Plans and WELS VEBA, visit [welsbpo.net](http://welsbpo.net). 



To sign up for the e-mail version, visit [wels.net/together](http://wels.net/together).