

Some items of note:

- 2022 marked the largest one-year decline in WELS members in history—2.8 percent, which amounts to about 10,000 members.
- In 2022 WELS had its largest one-year increase in in-person worship attendance, with almost 9,000 more souls gathering weekly than in 2021, an increase of 8.1 percent.
- 2022 marked the second time in three years that births in WELS fell below 3,000. In one decade, the birthrate in WELS has been more than cut in half.

As Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services, notes, “The Statistical Summary and Analysis points to opportunities before us. For example, in one decade, the unchurched students enrolled in WELS’ early childhood ministries and Lutheran elementary schools has skyrocketed. It doubled in the elementary schools. And with WELS’ birthrate in decline, there will be room to bring in more unchurched students. Yet, in that same decade, adult confirmations coming out of youth education ministries have remained relatively flat. The prayer is that as we study the harvest strategies of the youth education ministries the Lord seems to be blessing, we might identify tactics that can be used more broadly, so that we might reach more unchurched students and parents for Christ.”

Hein also explains that another opportunity is potentially provided

through church consolidations. Those are becoming more common in WELS, as churches seek to improve their “critical mass” by merging. “It will be interesting to watch how the Lord blesses these efforts to increase gospel ministry in future years,” says Hein.

Read the full WELS 2022 Statistical Summary and Analysis online at [welscongregationalervices.net/stats](https://welscongregationalervices.net/stats). 

# TOGETHER



July 18, 2023

## Prayers answered in Vietnam


Last Sat., July 15, and Sun., July 16, two events in Hanoi, Vietnam, were striking examples of how God answers the fervent prayers of his people.

On Saturday, WELS representatives as well as representatives of the Hmong Fellowship Church gathered to dedicate a new building that will house the theological education of pastors of the Hmong Fellowship Church. Until now, more than 50 Hmong pastors received theological training either online or in temporary locations. But now, after six years of planning, the building is complete and ready to be the permanent site for the training of the next group of pastors—60 now and another 60 next year. The new building has space for instruction and worship as well as residential facilities for the students.

On Sunday, we celebrated the graduation of 55 Hmong pastors from the theological training program. This seminary-level education has been carried out for more than six years, with the result that these men have now been thoroughly trained as Lutheran pastors who will help to shepherd congregations in a church body consisting of more than 140,000 members in more than 350 congregations. A dozen of these pastors were also commissioned to return to their home villages to instruct other Hmong pastors in biblical, Lutheran doctrine.

We are grateful to the government of Vietnam for granting WELS permission to carry out this training and to erect a building in which to do it. We are thankful to the Hmong Fellowship Church for inviting us to train its pastors. We thank the members of our synod for their generous gifts of love and faith to make this possible. Above all, we are thankful to our gracious God for giving us this amazing opportunity to share the gospel in Vietnam.

Learn more about the ministry going on in Vietnam at [wels.net/vietnam](https://wels.net/vietnam).

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder 



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

## LWMS celebrates 60 years at its annual convention

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On June 22-25, 2023, the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) gathered by the Mississippi River in La Crosse, Wis., to celebrate 60 years of supporting WELS Missions. The convention theme "Peace Like a River" reminded attendees that when Christ is at the center of our hearts, we know peace. More than 1,200 in-person and virtual attendees enjoyed worship, the annual flag presentation, and presentations from WELS home and world missionaries.

One highlight of the convention was a keynote by Missionary Elise Gross, the director of women's ministry for the WELS One Latin America team. Drawing on the biblical example of Joshua, Gross spoke about the "strength and courage" needed by our sisters throughout Latin America as they share Christ with those around them through the *Academia Cristo* program.

Mrs. Marli Camargo of Mexico was a first-time attendee and *Grupo Sembrador* (small learning group) leader who attended with Gross. She was especially moved by taking communion with 1,200 of her brothers and sisters in faith. "Thank you for the opportunity to know the family of Christ from around the world, and to know that although we are a small group here in Mexico, we are not alone," Camargo says. "Our family in Christ is enormous and blessed."

Convention attendees also learned about "training the trainers" in our sister synods in Africa, and one home missionary shared his experience with "upcycling evangelism" by repurposing

a former school in his community into a vibrant ministry center. Another plenary session explained how everyone can participate in making "100 Missions in 10 Years" a reality. Special "LWMS: 60 Years in 60 Seconds" videos showed highlights from the prior 60 years of gatherings.

"Each convention offers special joy-filled moments!" says Ms. Patsy Kramer, outgoing LWMS president. "This year included the opportunity to meet Marli, our sister in Christ from Mexico. Our Friday night art event was another highlight as Dr. Terry Schultz introduced his work in conjunction with the Bethany art program. Attendees met Prof. Andy Overn and five young female artists who are among those creating art depicting Bible stories now being used to share Jesus in mission fields."

Attendees are encouraged to share what they learn at the convention with their home congregations, and Camargo eagerly shared her experience with her *Grupo Sembrador* in Mexico: "They were so excited to hear it and also hope to participate in the future," she says. "Showing them pictures of people I met and telling them how wonderful this event was made their hearts jump with joy."

Each year, the LWMS circuits gather offerings for Home and World Missions projects. This year, more than \$93,000 was collected to support two projects: students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary who assist home mission congregations in summer, and WELS' work in new world mission fields. In addition, more than \$39,000 was collected through this year's LWMS kids c.a.r.e. project, supporting annual retreats for the children of WELS missionaries.

Mr. Sean Young, director of missions operations, reflects, "The yearly LWMS convention holds a special place in my heart as it brings together so many ladies (and the men who love them) in support of our Home, World, and Joint Missions. This year has again gone above and beyond in its work of shining a spotlight on our church body's ministry efforts!"

Mark your calendars for the 61st annual convention in Sioux Falls, S.D., on June 27-30, 2024, based on the theme "Being Built Into a Spiritual House."

Learn more about LWMS and watch the livestream recordings of this year's convention at [60.lwms.org](https://60.lwms.org) 

## Ukrainian churches connect through the crisis

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As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine continues, pastors and members of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC) continue to gather for worship and find ways to assist and reach out to their communities.


The Holy Spirit has blessed the efforts of the ULC, which has not only provided physical aid to people in need but also the comforting balm of Christ's gospel message.

The congregation in Ivanivka was able to hold a vacation Bible school this summer. About 25 students from four different villages attended to learn about Jesus' love as well as enjoy music, crafts, and singing.

In June, Resurrection Lutheran Church in Kyiv welcomed more than 60 people into the family of believers, three through Baptism and 57 through confirmation. Bishop Horpynchuk has been guiding more

than 70 refugees and visitors in the study of God's Word using the catechism. After finishing the course, the people who wished to become members confessed their faith in the Lord, joining in fellowship with the local congregation, the ULC, and all the members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

In just one example of the aid being provided, the church in Kiev is helping a family of five who lost their husband/father in the war. He was the family provider, so the congregation is providing the family food, medicine, and other daily necessities.

In a correspondence with Rev. Roger Neumann, the WELS liaison with Ukraine, Horpynchuk said, "Please continue to keep us in your prayers as we continue with catechism [instruction] and new people enrolled in the catechism class. The Lord is good and faithful; his Word never returns empty. Thank you to all the brothers and sisters in WELS who support us so faithfully in our most difficult times of this war!" 

## Current statistics offer insights for future planning

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The 2022 WELS Statistical Summary and Analysis is now available.

Each year, WELS collects data from all congregations and schools. That data is compiled in a statistical report containing information for every church, circuit, conference, and district. WELS Congregational Services then publishes an annual Statistical Summary & Analysis to help congregations and the synod plan how to best steward the resources God provides.