

About 70 percent of WELS congregations utilized some or all of the resources provided through 2018's synodwide outreach campaign, C18. Its goal was to reach one million souls, and Roecker has high hopes again this year with C19: "With the Lord's blessing, we would like to see more than one million people invited," he says.

Many C19 materials will be offered as free downloads at welscongregationalervices.net/c19. Some materials are available now; others will be provided in the coming weeks. Pastors and interested laypeople should sign up now to receive updates, which will include notices when new materials are posted online as well as planning tips and timelines to carry out the program successfully. ☪

Did you know...

WELS has a Facebook page?
facebook.com/welslutherans

WELS has Twitter?
twitter.com/welstweets

WELS has Instagram?
instagram.com/welslutherans

Ministerial education school enrollments

Total enrollment at the four ministerial education schools for the 2019-20 school year is 1,452, down slightly from 1,487 last year. Two of the schools saw small increases from last year; the other two schools experienced slightly lower enrollments.

Here are the unofficial opening enrollments at each school:

- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.: 120 (112 last year)
- Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.: 734 (764)
- Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.: 402 (419)
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.: 196 (192)

We thank God for moving these young people to prepare for the public ministry. We pray that he would bless them in their studies and bless the work of our ministerial education schools.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder ☪

Lutheran Leadership Conference to kick off 2020

WELS Congregational Services will host the first WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership at the Sheraton Grand in Chicago, Ill., Jan. 21-23. WELS Congregational Services works under the Conference of Presidents to help congregations assess, plan, and carry out gospel ministry.

The conference will have five keynote presentations that deal with major cultural challenges before every WELS congregation.

Twenty-five breakout sessions will deal with issues specific to certain congregations, including overcoming a consumer mentality in church, Christian apologetics, increasing volunteerism, retaining and gaining young members, fully utilizing the gifts of women in ministry, equipping members for personal evangelism, having a "high-expectations" church, strategic planning, using social media for outreach, operating a financially sustainable elementary school, and more.

"I hope individuals walk away from this conference with three things,"

says Rev. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of Congregational Services. “First, I hope they are motivated to throw themselves into gospel ministry in every way: feeding the faithful, reaching the lost, and pursuing the straying. Second, I hope attendees better understand the massive challenges before our congregations but also realize that God will help us meet those challenges. Finally, I hope that they can take home some practical resources from the breakout sessions that they can immediately implement in their mission efforts.”

The National Conference on Lutheran Leadership is open to all: called workers and lay volunteers, men and women, lifelong Lutherans and new congregants. Congregations are encouraged to send multiple participants to the conference.

“A church gets the most out of a conference like this when there is a critical mass of members attending,” Hein says. “They can divide up and hit every relevant breakout. They can present a united, excited voice when they go back to their congregation.”

Travel rebates are available for congregations that send three or more individuals to the event.

Registration is now open, with an early registration discount through Oct. 31. Register online at lutheranleadership.com. There you can also find free promotional materials—including a video, posters, social media graphics, and other digital images. 

Learning to be a church that welcomes members home

As part of its “Welcome Home” initiative resources, WELS Congregational Services released a series of four videos with accompanying Bible studies to address some of the most common reasons Christians stop attending church and how to show love and minister to these members. The videos are meant to be used by congregational leaders and members to guide congregations as they strive to bring straying sheep back to the Good Shepherd. Rev. Nate Bourman, Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis., was featured in the videos discussing how to be a welcoming congregation.

Bourman explains that a welcoming church is “a church where no one stands or sits alone; everyone feels comfortable and safe. A place where everyone knows what is going on and feels that they can navigate the facilities or get information about our congregation. A place where parents, adults, and children feel safe to hear God’s Word and can easily participate and are welcomed to participate.”

He says the most common reasons he’s heard that members haven’t felt welcome is because they weren’t greeted, no one talks to them, and they felt like an outsider. “It’s possible to be a stranger in your own house,” says Bourman.

It’s important that all members participate in being a welcoming

church. “Care and concern for the members of the church is not just the pastor’s job. It is not just the elders’ job. It is the job of each and every member. Love calls us to participate in their care. None of us sits on the sidelines when it comes to welcoming God’s people home,” says Bourman. “All are coming to church with sin and weakness and brokenness and frustration. Be part of the throng rejoicing to gather for worship with each other.”

All congregations are encouraged to participate in the Welcome Home Sunday, either Oct. 20 or 27, 2019. The mission is to “pack the church” with every member. The four videos and accompanying Bible studies in the Welcoming Returning Members series—“Members drawn away because of sin,” “Members who left after being sinned against,” “Members whose needs were ignored,” and “Members who left for another church”—are available at welscongregationalservices.net/welcome-home. 

C19: Sharing the meaning of Christmas with others

According to current research, Christmas is the most appealing time for the unchurched and dechurched to attend a worship service. That makes C19, this year’s synodwide outreach campaign for Christmas, a critical opportunity.

Available from WELS Congregational Services, C19 equips congregations and individuals to share the good news of Jesus’ birth

with others in their community and to invite them to Christmas worship services. This year’s theme is “God so loved the world.”

“Many people look at the pain and suffering in our world and conclude that either there is no God or that, if there is a God, he doesn’t love the world,” explains Rev. Eric Roecker, director of WELS Commission on Evangelism. “Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem proves that God does indeed love the world, a world that includes every single soul.”

Here are some of the resources that are available:

- Worship materials for Christmas. C19 provides ready-to-use worship folder templates with liturgy and music that edify heart, soul, and mind.
- Evangelism materials for Christmas Eve. Low-cost outreach postcards as well as free Facebook video advertisement and digital files to post on church websites are available to share the message of the theme.
- School resources. C19 provides guidance for using schools as outreach arms during the Christmas season. The program resources help encourage even the youngest WELS members to invite others to worship on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
- Special needs ministry. C19 includes materials to help congregations reach out to families who have children with special needs.