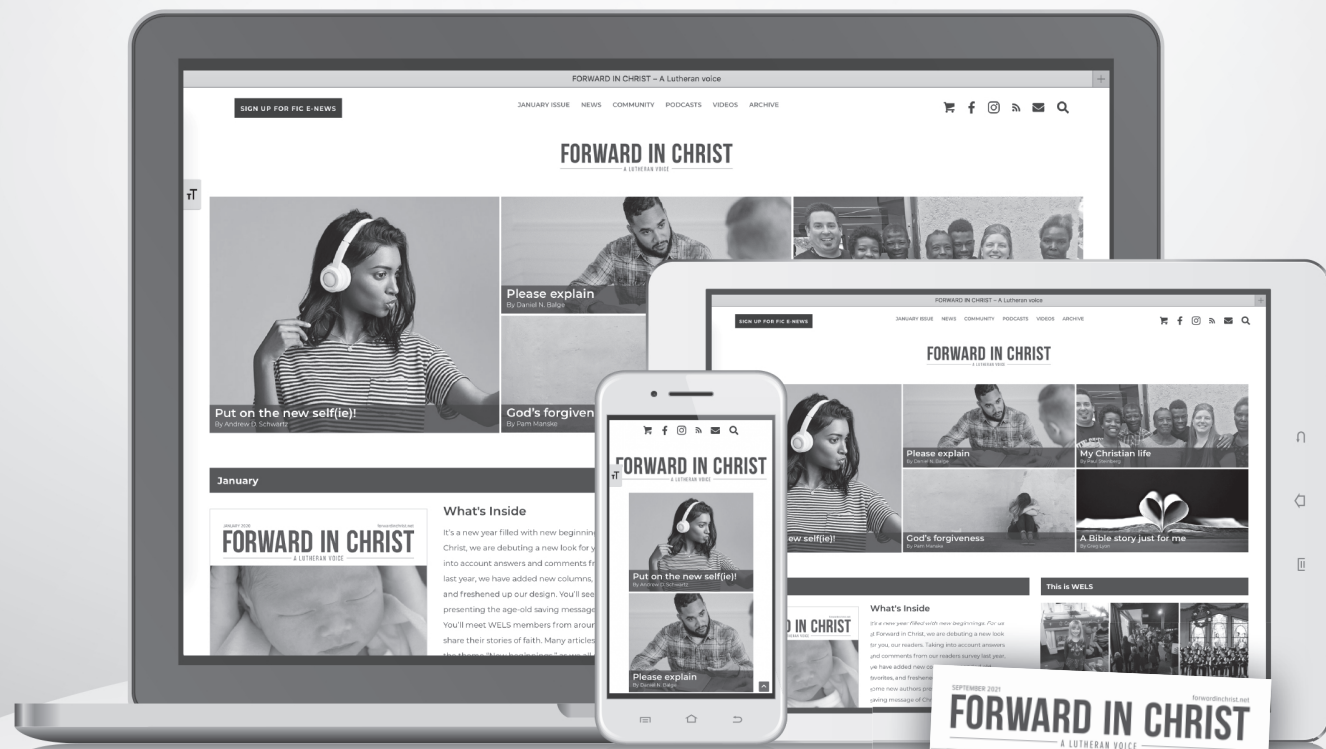


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2021 synod convention opens with worship

Around 200 convention attendees and guests filled the chapel at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., on the evening of Monday, July 26, for the opening worship service of the 66th biennial convention.

WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder presided over the service and Rev. Joel Voss, WELS second vice president and pastor at Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, preached a sermon themed “By God’s Grace, Here We Still Stand” based on Colossians 3:15-17. Rev. James Huebner, WELS first vice president and pastor at Grace, Milwaukee, Wis., was the cantor for the service.

Voss says, “Our Lord’s encouragement in Colossians chapter 3 is to let his Word dwell in us richly. That Word led Luther to take his stand at the Diet of Worms 500 years ago, and, by God’s grace, that’s where our beloved WELS still stands today. That’s all due to the grace of God. May we ever cherish it!”

The impact of strong singing accompanied by a quality pipe organ and brass ensemble made the service a memorable and joyful worship experience.

Rev. Bruce E. Schwark, who serves Christ/Rockwood/St. Peter in the Manitowoc Conference, Wis., was moved by the music. “I always enjoy singing *Thy Strong Word* with the fanfare of the trumpets and as a tribute to Professor Franzmann, who wrote the words. The sermon also hit the point about what we are all about: preaching the Word. That’s what I do as a pastor. The service motivated me to keep doing that.”

“I was amazed at how great the hymns sounded and how great the preachers were,” agreed Mr. Kenneth Stephens, first-time lay delegate from Zion, Valentine, Neb. He says, “The singing was so joyful. The service was so impressive, and it really gets to my heart. I’m glad I’m here.”

You can watch the entire worship service at wels.net/news-media/2021synodconvention/convention-livestream.

Delegates work together at hybrid convention

Three hundred thirty voting delegates attended WELS’ 66th biennial convention. This included 156 lay delegates (118

virtual, 38 in person), 71 teachers/staff ministers (58 virtual, 13 in person), and 103 pastors (76 virtual, 27 in person). The chairman, secretary, and two lay delegates from each floor committee were invited to attend the convention in person. Others were then encouraged to attend online as virtual delegates.

The work of the convention delegates looked different for this convention than it did in the past. Because most delegates were not at Luther Preparatory School but attended virtually from home, much of the convention business was conducted before the convention.

Most floor committees met in June via Zoom to discuss the ministry that was assigned to them. During these meetings, members discussed the ministry and its corresponding report in the *Book of Reports and Memorials*, heard from representatives of that ministry so that questions could be answered when needed, and then crafted reports and resolutions for delegates to consider during the convention.

“I saw definite advantages to doing a lot of work ahead of time in our floor committees,” says Prof. Steven Pagels, who served as chairman of Floor Committee #10: Ministerial Education. “We were then able to make more efficient use of our time during the convention. The downside was not getting to know fellow committee members as well, but we did take time to introduce ourselves at our first meeting, which helped.”

Elections also took place before the convention began via online ballots. During the convention, online participants could vote via online voting on resolutions presented to delegates.

James Lake, a virtual delegate from Grace, Falls Church, Va., says that the technology he needed to participate worked well and notes, “**Participation in the convention from a practical standpoint was pretty seamless.** It was very interesting to learn more about how the business of the synod is carried out. I loved seeing the earnestness of the participants. Even though most voting seemed to be almost pro forma, it seemed more to be due to unity of purpose rather than any sort of complacency.”

Visit wels.net/2021synodconvention to see all the reports and resolutions presented to the delegates during the convention as well as election results and other convention business.

All convention documents, presentations, videos, photos, and other resources can be found at wels.net/2021synodconvention.

Special guests offer greetings

Presidents of two U.S.-based Lutheran church bodies addressed convention delegates on Tuesday.

Rev. Glenn Obenberger brought greetings from WELS' sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). Obenberger became ELS president after former president Rev. John Moldstad Jr. unexpectedly passed away in January. "We still grieve but do not grieve without hope," said Obenberger. "John shall rise again for Jesus' sake, so we go forward."

Obenberger encouraged the synod to continue to stand on God's Word. **"WELS, like the ELS, is committed to carrying out the mission of the church which Jesus has given us, making the same bold confessions based on the Word of God: That grace alone is the truth which sets sinners like us eternally free,"** he said. "May God grant you the strength and wisdom to continue taking that bold, old Lutheran stance in the face of all opposition."

He then presented Pres. Mark Schroeder a commemorative book on the history of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), also addressed convention delegates, calling it an honor and privilege to attend and speak at a WELS synod convention.

WELS, ELS, and LCMS representatives have been meeting annually for informal doctrinal discussions since 2012. This is the first time that Harrison has attended a WELS synod convention.

In his historic address, Harrison brought up "tragic things" in the synods' past, referring to the break in fellowship in 1961 and events that occurred following the break. Yet he stressed the Missouri Synod's stance on the Word: "The Missouri Synod confesses Christ and the inerrancy of Scripture. And the Lord blesses us despite ourselves."

He also expressed appreciation for the continuing dialogue among the three church bodies, even though significant issues still separate the synods. "I thank you, Mark [Schroeder], for reaching out to me and the Missouri Synod, despite our challenging past," he said. "We deeply appreciate your prayers and you have ours."

Following Harrison's address, WELS President Mark Schroeder mentioned the importance of these informal doctrinal discussions. **"From the start, we believed that it was a debt of Christian love that we needed to pay for us to be talking with our friends in the Missouri Synod about important issues in doctrine and practice. I think you can sense from what Pres. Harrison said that it has truly been a mutually encouraging and beneficial set of conversations, and we pray that they will be able to continue."**

Harrison and Obenberger are two of five special guests at this year's convention. Rev. Paul Tiefel representing the Church of

the Lutheran Confession and two other representatives from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Shaw and Rev. Dr. John Wohlrabe Jr., also are attending. ☩

First vice president, other synod position members elected

Election results for various synodical positions—including first vice president and recording secretary—were announced Tuesday morning, July 27. Elections were conducted electronically prior to the convention, making it easier for virtual delegates to participate.

Delegates reelected Rev. James Huebner to his fourth term as the synod's first vice president.

"It is a privilege to be able to continue serving as WELS' first vice president, a very humbling privilege at that," says Huebner, pastor at Grace, Milwaukee, Wis. **"I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve our Savior and our synod as we stand together on the Holy Scriptures and go forward together in our mission to proclaim Jesus' forgiving love to all."**

They also reelected Rev. Robert Pasbrig as recording secretary. He has served in this role since 2005.

Various other synodical positions—14 in all—also needed to be filled. These positions ranged from chairman of the Board for Home Missions (BHM) to members (pastor, teacher/staff minister, and layman) of the Board for Ministerial Education (BME) to at-large representatives on the Synodical Council. ☩

Schroeder delivers President's Report

On Tuesday morning WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder addressed the delegates, beginning his report by recalling Martin Luther's stance in the face of demands to retract his position against the unscriptural actions of the church of the day. Luther had boldly proclaimed, "I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."

Schroeder then connected the stance taken by Luther with the stance we as Christians take today in a culture that will attack the truth of God's Word: "The theme of this convention presents us with an opportunity—as individuals, as congregations, and as a synod—to stand exactly where Luther stood, on the unchanging Word of God as proclaimed in the Scriptures." He added, **"Our only defense against these attacks is to do what Luther did: To stand boldly on the truth of God's Word."**

Schroeder continued by recounting some of the challenges congregations faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He also listed some of the blessings that God provided throughout the pandemic, including the steadfastness of WELS members

survivors. Finally, sponsoring organization costs will remain more stable over time."

As the WELS Retirement Benefit Strategy Committee worked on developing a future retirement program that would best serve the synod, sponsoring organizations, and workers, it sought input from called workers across the synod as well as experts in benefit plans and finance. It also developed tools to help workers and sponsoring organizations understand how the changes will affect them. In addition, Peterman answered questions from delegates today to make sure that the new plan is well understood.

The final proposal that was passed by convention delegates approves the Pension Plan to be frozen on Dec. 31, 2021, which means that no new benefits will be earned under the Pension Plan for any service performed after Dec. 31, 2021. Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, eligible workers will be provided with contributions to be used for retirement benefits through a defined contribution plan that will be administered through the Shepherd Plan, which is the name of WELS' retirement savings plan for synod workers.

Learn more about the plan at welsbpo.net/retirement-changes-faq. Calculate retirement benefits for synod workers using the newly passed defined contribution plan at wels-pension-calculator.web.app. ☩

Serving the hurting with ministry of compassion

WELS Christian Aid and Relief Director Rev. Daniel Sims reported about work carried out over the past year, which is supported fully by the generous offerings of God's people. Sims emphasized that Christian Aid and Relief strives to imitate and reflect Christ's compassion, carefully assess needs and opportunities, personalize relief efforts, and, above all, seize every opportunity to proclaim the gospel. Volunteers are utilized whenever possible to carry out its mission.

After showing a video to introduce delegates to Christian Aid and Relief, Sims spoke about three main areas of this compassion ministry: disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and personal grants.

Sims also touched on some upcoming initiatives, like the creation of a devotion book entitled *An Ever-Present Help in Trouble*. The audience of the book is twofold: people who have been through a disaster and people who don't know much about Jesus. "We hope to give these books away to those we are serving in a disaster to encourage them with

God's truth and connect them both to their Savior and the local congregation," said Sims.

Sims concluded his report by talking about future goals: **"One of our major goals for the next few years is to expand our disaster relief efforts by establishing district disaster relief teams across WELS. It is our dream to have a curated library of disaster training materials and a well-trained corps of leaders and volunteers who are prepared to provide relief in every disaster situation. Our Disaster Relief Task Force will begin meeting this fall to begin this work in earnest."**

Learn more about the work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief at wels.net/relief. ☩

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WELS has a Facebook page?
facebook.com/welslutherans

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All convention documents, presentations, videos, photos, and other resources can be found at wels.net/2021synodconvention.



To sign up for the e-mail version of *Together*, visit wels.net/together.

for the **Visually Impaired** producing materials in digital audio formats and Braille; **WELS Military Services** reaching more service members due to an increased response to the online referral form at wels.net/refer; and **Freedom for the Captives** encouraging all churches to adopt abuse prevention policies and take the Standing Up For Children Training to recognize and prevent abuse and protect children.

Introducing the Commission on Evangelism, Director Rev. Eric Roecker says, **“Our culture is experiencing a radical shift in its attitude towards religion. Fewer and fewer people are growing up as active members of a Christian congregation. More and more people see the church as irrelevant at best, harmful at worst. We believe this means it will be even more important going forward for the members of our congregations to be encouraged and equipped for personal evangelism. The reason? While unchurched people may not trust churches, they do tend to trust their Christian friends and neighbors.”**

To help congregations and members cultivate a culture of personal outreach, WELS Evangelism has made a number of resources available.

- **Everyone Outreach** is designed to help a congregation build a culture of outreach so that every ministry and every member is thinking about and participating in outreach.
- **Let’s Go** encourages and equips Christians to become more comfortable and confident in their personal witnessing.
- The **One by One Bible study** is based on Rev. David Rosenau’s keynote presentation at the 2020 WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership.

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, director of the Commission on Discipleship, describes what discipleship is: **“It’s a believer’s walk in Christ, from life’s first cry to final breath. It’s the life of the Christian whether at their home or at their church. It’s our unique callings as men and women, children and teens, and young adults. It’s singles, parents, spouses. It’s healthy living in Christ.”**

Resources range from **Marriage Moments** videos to youth Bible studies to Catechism class models to women’s ministry resources.

In response to how worship life changed during the pandemic, Discipleship released **God’s People Gather**, which provides resources that help churches put together a congregation-specific plan that reaches out to the various types of members who have not yet returned to church. Access resources at welscongregationalservices.net/gods-people-gather.

A God-Lived Life is a whole-life challenge to God’s people to live the life to which he has called them. The hope is that being challenged in specific ways will urge them to put into practice a closer walk with God and a life of love toward others.

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director of the Commission on Worship, reported on its work for the soon-to-be-available **Christian Worship: Hymnal**.

Gerlach introduced the Year C planning tool to coincide with the new hymnal. “It gives guidance on introducing new liturgy songs and hymns that fit the new lectionary. The Year C planner will also save time for pastors. It provides both seasonal themes and themes for each Sunday. The planner is coordinated with comprehensive resources for worship, evangelism, and discipleship.”

He also reported on the upcoming **National Hymnal Week**, Sept. 19–26, which has been designed to celebrate worship and introduce churches to the new hymnal. The new hymnals are not needed to participate. Resources are available at welscongregationalservices.net/national-hymnal-week. Congregations interested in participating can subscribe at welscongregationalservices.net/subscriptions to receive updates.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, director of the WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling, reports, **“In 2020, for the first time in American history, the number of Americans who claimed they had a church home dropped below 50 percent. Virtually every Christian denomination is in statistical decline. We are not immune. Last year, one WELS church closed about every five weeks. How do we face these challenges? What is our strategy for conducting ministry in a post-Christian America? What, if anything, can we do about the growing hostility toward religion? Those are the types of topics we will be discussing at the second WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership, which we are planning to hold in Chicago in January of 2023.”**

WELS Congregational Services is committed to building a library of resources to strengthen WELS congregations’ ministries and members. More information can be found at welscongregationalservices.net.

Delegates endorse new retirement plan for synod workers

Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of WELS Benefit Plans, presented the findings of the WELS Retirement Benefit Strategy Committee to delegates on Wednesday morning. This included the details of the proposal to change WELS’ current Pension Plan to a defined contribution plan for future worker retirement benefits.

“There are three main advantages to the change,” notes Peterman. “First, workers will receive meaningful contributions for retirement benefits. Then, workers will have more flexibility to provide for their retirement income needs and to share savings with their

in supporting gospel work: “God’s people remained faithful in bringing their offerings during the past year and, in fact, were even more generous than before. That was true for the offerings received by the synod and, in many cases, for congregations. With those increased offerings, no reductions in mission or ministry were required by the synod. In fact, the Synodical Council was able to approve additional resources for previously unfunded ministry.”

The results of these blessings on ministry include a planned increase in the establishment of home mission congregations and more opportunities to share the gospel in new world mission fields. In addition, Schroeder spoke about the blessings of funding for new facilities at Martin Luther College, a variety of new resources and assistance for congregations through Congregational Services, and the production of a new hymnal.

Schroeder then addressed some of the other challenges to the synod, including the shortage of called workers.

In conclusion, Schroeder urged the synod to remain as faithful as possible, even in light of a small but steady decline in membership: “First, we strive with God’s help to remain faithful to the Word (not changing the message to become more appealing or attractive). Second, we ask God to move each of our congregations and each of us as individuals to share the gospel whenever and wherever God gives the opportunity. Third, as we strive to be faithful to the Word and to our God-given mission, we trust firmly that God will work through his Word in the ways and places that he determines best—accomplishing his desire and achieving his purpose.”

View the full report at wels.net/2021synodconvention.

Standing for the gospel

On Tuesday afternoon, Rev. Earle Treptow, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., presented his convention essay titled, “Here We Stand: Imitating Luther’s Faith.”

The essay walked delegates through the time in Luther’s life that led to his invitation to the Diet of Worms, his time in front of the dignitaries where he made his famous statement upon which the theme of the convention was based, and the aftermath of the stand he took facing the emperor—the stand he made for the gospel.

“Stories are powerful. And this story is particularly powerful for those who love the message of forgiveness full and free in Christ,” says Treptow. “Most Lutherans know what Luther said on April 18, 1521—at least the ‘Here I stand’ portion—but they may not be as familiar with what led up to it and what followed after it. By telling the fuller story and sharing some details, I am hoping for a couple of things. First, I am hoping that people might be identifying lessons for their lives as Christians on their own as they hear the story and reflect on it. Second, I want to ground the lessons I identified in the story itself.”

Treptow then applied this chapter of Luther’s life to how Christians today should approach the gospel and the truth and blessing of God’s Word.

The essay illustrates Martin Luther’s passion for the gospel and notes that the same Lord who empowered Luther to confidently, yet humbly, profess his faith, continues to work in the hearts of believers today.

Treptow summarizes his main theme: **“I want convention attendees to follow in Luther’s footsteps, in his passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ. His greatest concern was that the gospel be proclaimed clearly to all, so that consciences are comforted and God is glorified. Let’s stand for the gospel because the gospel has seized our hearts. . . . We proclaim God’s law for the sake of the gospel. Our desire is that all would know Jesus as their Savior.”**

To read the essay or watch the archived livestream of the presentation, visit wels.net/2021synodconvention.

New WELS hymnal presented

“I present to our church body *Christian Worship: Hymnal* for the glory of God and the edification of his people.”

Rev. Michael Schultz, director of the WELS Hymnal Project, said these words as he presented the first copy of the new hymnal to President Mark Schroeder Wednesday morning, July 28.

It has been 28 years since a presentation like this happened and 10 years since the 2011 synod convention resolved to establish the WELS Hymnal Project committee. This fall, the new hymnal, psalter, and multiple supporting resources for pastors, musicians, and worship planners will be available to congregations and WELS members. In September, Northwestern Publishing House will send every congregation two copies of *Christian Worship: Hymnal* and one copy of *Christian Worship: Psalter* as a preview.

Schultz called for a celebration as he shared more about the 17 books, 3 digital products, and multiple accompaniment volumes that are part of the Christian Worship suite of resources—resources that the WELS Hymnal Project states are “for a generation yet unborn.”

“These are books that will put our worshipping church body in a good place for the next 20 to 30 years,” said Schultz.

Schultz thanked the 90 to 100 volunteers who served on 12 committees for the last nine years as part of the WELS Hymnal Project. He also highlighted the work of Northwestern Publishing House in the production of the suite of resources and acknowledged the support and partnership of the Synodical Council and WELS Congregational Services throughout the process.

As part of his presentation, Schultz announced the first major release for the hymnal project: a limited release of the new lectionary through the *Christian Worship: Service Builder* electronic resource. Access the lectionary at builder.christianworship.com.

WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder asked delegates to resolve to thank all who worked on the project to the glory of God and to formally accept and adopt *Christian Worship: Hymnal* as the official hymnal of WELS. He also encouraged all congregations to use this resource not just in their churches but also in their homes.

The presentation ended with delegates praising God through the singing of the Doxology.

Visit christianworship.com for more information about the hymnal. 🌐

Delegates approve balanced ministry financial plan

“WELS is financially strong,” says Mr. Kyle Egan, WELS’ chief financial officer. “God continues to bless WELS with the financial gifts needed to maintain current ministry levels and to develop a well-balanced ministry financial plan for the next biennium.”

Egan shared WELS’ recent financial information with synod convention delegates and explained key elements of the proposed ministry financial plan for the upcoming biennium of 2021–23. Following his presentation, delegates approved the ministry financial plan.

Prof. Daniel Balge, a pastor delegate from the Minnesota District, served as chairman of the convention floor committee that dealt with the ministry financial plan. Balge notes that **“the plan reflects God’s financial blessings to the Wisconsin Synod. With gratitude for the recent past and with thoughtful confidence for the near future, our synod’s leaders have put forward a plan that energetically supports the sharing of the gospel.”**

The plan includes support for WELS ministerial education, Missions, and Congregational Services. For details, see Egan’s full presentation, which is available at wels.net/2021synodconvention. 🌐

Preparing and supporting future called workers

Rev. Paul Prange, Rev. Duane Rodewald, and Rev. Richard Gurgel spoke to convention delegates about the blessings and goals of WELS Ministerial Education as it prepares candidates for the public ministry as well as provides continuing education to those who are already serving.

Prange, administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education, highlighted the four schools that the synod supports: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn.; and Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., the synod’s two preparatory high schools. About 1,400 students attend the

four schools, and 2,000 current ministers of the gospel are in continuing education courses provided by MLC and WLS.

Rodewald, chairman of the Board for Ministerial Education (BME), talked about a special task force that was recently created to improve the retention and better support men who are training to be pastors as a second or third career. “We recognize the challenges and unique sacrifices that need to be made,” says Rodewald about these students and their families. The task force will present its first report to the board in October.

After commenting on all the different educational areas the board maintains, Prange revealed another area the BME is focusing on: student educational debt, especially for MLC students.

Providing financial aid for MLC students is one of the three pillars of the ongoing “Equipping Christian Witnesses” (ECW) campaign. Rev. Richard Gurgel, MLC president, shared more with the delegates about this campaign, including that more than \$7.5 million has already been donated or pledged. Construction also has begun on the Betty Kohn Fieldhouse, one of two facilities MLC is looking to build from donations to this campaign. Student recruitment is the final ECW goal.

“‘Equipping Christian Witnesses’ is about building a foundation for years to come,” says Gurgel. “We want to renew and reinvigorate our investment as a synod to raise up future generations of faithful and qualified staff ministers, teachers, and pastors.” A video shown to delegates highlighted each pillar of the campaign, which will continue through June 30, 2022.

Visit mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign to learn more about “Equipping Christian Witnesses.” 🌐

New Home Missions goal set for 2023–2033

On Wednesday morning, delegates approved an ambitious new Home Missions initiative that will begin in 2023.

“Being fully convinced that grace received is grace to share,” reads the resolution, “we commemorate the 175-year milestone of our synod’s history (1850–2025) by challenging ourselves, under God’s grace and with his blessing, to set a goal of establishing 100 new missions and 75 new or enhanced ministries throughout North America over the next 10 years, starting July 1, 2023, under the auspices of Home Missions, working together with WELS areas of ministry and their traditional mission partners.”

A task force of WELS Home Missions is exploring the challenges and opportunities that this initiative presents.

“The task force’s work has already been rewarding,” says Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions.

“It’s clear that we have men and women in all areas of ministry of our synod who are dedicated to this initiative. They want to do their part in reaching more souls with the gospel. In fact, we can see how we stand on the shoulders of present and past leaders who have encouraged and supported worker

training, home missions, world missions, and all the other important areas of our synod.”

“Starting and supporting missions in North America doesn’t just happen through the efforts of those in Home Missions,” notes Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions. “Home Missions needs and appreciates the support of many in WELS to reach many outside of WELS with God’s Word.”

To learn more about WELS Home Missions, visit wels.net/homemissions. 🌐

World Missions shares updates and blessings

WELS World Missions has been able to continue the Christian’s Great Commission to spread the Word throughout the world, even during a global pandemic, reported WELS World Missions Chairman Rev. Paul Janke and WELS World Missions Administrator Rev. Larry Schlomer.

While COVID-19 certainly impacted in-person mission work and travel, Janke says, “To paraphrase Isaiah, this has been a time for strengthening the stakes so we can lengthen the cords. So when things open up it can be a time of sharing the gospel with more and more people. Because so much of our work these days has been able to go online, this has actually been a time when world mission work has been able to flourish through vehicles like *Academia Cristo* and TELL, the English-language version of *Academia Cristo*.”

Janke says the number of people being reached through these two gospel and outreach training apps from Multi-Language Productions—more than three million—is “evidence that the Lord is using these difficult times to turn people to his Word and to the living hope that we have in Jesus Christ and his resurrection of the dead.”

Janke concludes, “I want to speak a word of thanks for the generous offerings that come from congregations and individuals, even during this time of pandemic. Because of the generosity of WELS people, World Missions is well funded and can take advantage of the numerous opportunities that have been handed to us by the Lord.”

Schlomer continued the World Missions presentation by providing an overview of the work and blessings around the world.

He reported that in East Asia, a particularly dark place for the gospel where few people have heard the Word, the number of house churches has doubled—throughout the pandemic.

In Vietnam, more than 60 future pastors are being trained to reach the Hmong people in that country. Throughout the shutdowns, these men were able to continue their training digitally. This first group of pastors is about a year away from graduating. There are about 135,000 members that make up the Hmong Fellowship Church.

In Latin America, online outreach efforts through *Academia Cristo* have connected the Latin America missions team with potential church planters in many different countries. Additional manpower is needed to follow up with these contacts and continue training new Christians in grace-

starved Latin America. Plans are underway to add up to five new positions to the team, which could be made up of pastors, staff ministers, teachers, and laypeople.

World Missions has plans to send missionaries to two new fields, London and Senegal. The London area is already home to more than 50 WELS families who could serve as a nucleus for outreach. In addition, due to government policy changes, more than 20 percent of members from WELS’ partner church in Hong Kong have moved to the United Kingdom, including two pastors.

Schlomer says Senegal is a “raw” mission, but it appears that the country is open to missionaries and mission work. **“We are not going here because we have a contact; we don’t have an invitation. We are going because we know those people don’t have the gospel.”** Two missionaries will go to learn the language, meet the people, and seek opportunities to share the gospel.

Schlomer says that it is possible, especially with the growing church in Vietnam, that the number of Christians in our fellowship around the world could exceed the number of members in North America.

“We think this is significant for us as a confessional Lutheran church body, standing on the rock-solid Word of God, and now with the privilege of having these connections all around the world.” 🌐

Working with congregations for ministry

WELS Congregational Services addressed convention delegates this year via a video summary of the work it’s doing to help congregations carry out local ministry.

Mr. Jim Rademan, director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools, began by thanking educators and families for their dedication to sharing Jesus with the 41,000 students in WELS’ early childhood ministries, Lutheran elementary schools, and high schools during the particularly trying year.

In his update he shared a new opportunity for school leaders: “I’m excited to announce new partners who assist us with providing skills and support for current school leaders. Through a generous grant from the Kern Foundation and partnership with Milwaukee School of Engineering, early childhood directors, principals, and school leaders can earn a business certificate designed specifically for school leaders. We pray this unique program will enhance their leadership skills; increase leader retention; and God-willing, grow their school’s impact in their community.”

Rev. Jim Behringer, director of the Commission on Special Ministries, followed. He began by saying, “Special Ministries helps congregations serve individuals with disabilities, struggles, and special circumstances, people who can’t be served in the usual way churches function. We encourage Christian love in action.”

Behringer reviewed the myriad ways groups within Special Ministries carry out this calling. This includes the **Mission**