

WHO IS WELS?

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) began in 1850 with three German pastors meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Since then WELS has grown to:

- > 1,270 congregations in the United States, Canada, Antigua, Grenada, and St. Lucia with 369,221 baptized members served by 1,512 pastors; hundreds of missions worldwide
- > Christian education; 403 early childhood ministries; 313 Lutheran elementary schools; 25 Lutheran high schools; 2 preparatory schools served by 2,647 teachers educating 41,138 young souls; and a teacher-training college, and a pastor-training seminary

The college, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a dual purpose school. One track prepares men and women for the teaching ministry in early childhood, elementary, and high school levels. The second track prepares men for entry into the WELS pastor training school, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

MLC is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

The elementary education program of MLC is approved by the Minnesota Board of Teaching. Graduates of this program may be recommended for a Minnesota teaching license.

WELS MISSION

As men, women, and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and eternity, using the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF WELS

The organizational structure of WELS is comprised of two areas of ministry: 1) Mission and Ministry and 2) Support Services. Congregational Ministry Support Group (CMSG) is one division of Mission and Ministry. The Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS) is one unit in the division of the Congregational Ministry Support Group.

The CLS exists to guide and assist WELS congregations in advancing the Gospel of Jesus by providing resources, training, and personal assistance for starting and strengthening Lutheran schools. To carry out that mission the CLS works with schools:

- To help students grow as followers of Jesus
- To strengthen families
- To help teachers improve their ministry to children
- To help administrators in their leadership responsibilities
- To strengthen the school so that it is a stronger arm of the congregation as it uses the Bible to nurture believers and reach out to those who as yet do not believe in Jesus as their Savior.

Twelve districts are also part of WELS administrative structure. The United States and several neighboring countries are divided geographically into those 12 districts. Each district has an administrative structure similar to the WELS structure. The district Lutheran Schools Coordinator and his committee are part of the district structure and are responsible for carrying out the same functions as the CLS does for the synod.

As the CLS strives to strengthen Lutheran schools, it has established its own accrediting agency, namely, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod School Accreditation (WELSSA). The CLS is responsible for setting the policy for WELSSA. The CLS implements that policy through its office staff and in cooperation with the 12 district Lutheran Schools Coordinators.

The CLS has developed the WELSSA Handbook to guide and assist WELS schools through the accrediting process.

HISTORY OF THE WELS SCHOOL SYSTEM

Christians take seriously the Lord Jesus' directive to teach children "everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 20). Many WELS congregations, therefore, started elementary schools of their own shortly after the synod was founded in 1850. Until the 1920's the instruction in those schools was done in the German language. The number of Lutheran elementary schools (LES) grew gradually till that number now stands at 313. Most LESs are owned and operated by individual or small groups of congregations.

The first area Lutheran high school (ALHS) opened in Milwaukee in the early 1900's. Groups of congregations in geographic areas founded the Lutheran high schools and are totally responsible for their operation.

Early Childhood Ministries (ECM) are a growing phenomenon in WELS. Many WELS congregations began these ministries in the 70's, 80's, and 90's to help serve the needs of WELS families and to reach out with God's Word to unchurched preschool children and their families.

DESCRIPTION OF WELS SCHOOLS

In general WELS elementary schools are comparatively small. Nearly 77% of those schools have an enrollment of 100 or less in grades K-8. The largest LES has an enrollment of 693 students. These schools are located in 29 states within the twelve districts.

The total enrollment in the LESs during the past years averaged about 24,000. Of this number nearly 65% are members of the sponsoring congregations, 7% are members of other WELS congregations, 16% belong to Christian congregations not in fellowship with WELS, and over 6% are children with no church affiliation.

Over the past year enrollment in ALHSs and preparatory schools was over 5,800 students.

Over 75 percent of the teachers and principals in ALHSs, LESs, and ECMs received their training at Martin Luther College. Those teachers who have not been trained in WELS operated schools are expected to earn WELS certification by taking a prescribed set of courses which focus on Bible teachings and the Scriptural philosophy of WELS Lutheran schools.

Most elementary school administrators are either full-time or part-time teachers in addition to their administrative duties. In many schools the principal has other responsibilities in the congregation.

Of the 1,755 called teachers who serve in LESs all have responsibilities in the congregation that has called them. They direct church choirs, play the organ for worship services, help with youth programs, teach vacation Bible school, or are involved in other congregational activities.

WELS ALHSs are also comparatively small. The largest ALHS has 768 students and the smallest has 59 students. There are 454 called teachers currently serving. These schools are owned and supported by federations of congregations in the area surrounding the school. Funding comes from congregations' budget and fees.

ECMs are also funded and operated by local congregations. Over the past 20 years this growing ministry includes 403 programs with 438 called teachers serving 10,911 children. Of these 219 are associated with LESs and 184 are stand-alone programs.

PHILOSOPHY OF WELS SCHOOLS

WELS schools exist to educate children, strengthen families, and serve the church with the power of teaching that is deeply rooted in the Bible and fully expresses the love of Jesus.

WELS educational leaders hold to these foundational beliefs:

1. God's teachings in the Bible are the foundation of every point of view, action, and product in Lutheran schools.
2. Christ's love compels all, adults and children, to serve others as he did.
3. Outreach and nurture are both necessary in our ministry to children, parents, congregation, and the community.
4. High quality Christian education is solely a blessing from our gracious God.
5. High quality Christian education is an expression of our desire to do all things to the glory of God.
6. High quality Christian education is an integral part of making Christian disciples of young children and of reaching out into the community with the gospel.
7. Christian education is a team responsibility involving parents, school, and congregation.
8. High quality Christian education is an expression of the good stewardship of the blessings which God has graciously given us.
9. WELS schools benefit children, improve the health of families, and are an important part of the ministry of Christ's church.
10. Lutheran schools help students and parents use their God-given gifts to honor him.
11. WELS schools are enthusiastic champions of children, teachers, and Christian education in a way that seeks the greater good of Christ's kingdom and the congregation(s).