

WELS Long Range Plan for 2017

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:4-6).

We affirm that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can create and sustain faith. Thus, spiritual results related to the growth of the Holy Christian Church are completely in the hands of God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the Means of Grace to accomplish the results that only he can work, and he has entrusted the Means of Grace to human beings as his messengers. It is, therefore, a stewardship issue that we are outlining in this document. We want to be faithful stewards of the resources God has given us by planning our activities (sometimes called “strategies”) in order to move toward the goals (sometimes called “results”) for the visible church known as the WELS, which we, under God’s blessing, hope to attain.

At the heart of our planning for the future is our desire to seek the lost as well as nurture the found. We do that as individuals and as congregations working together in a confessional Lutheran church body, that is, we carry out our gospel ministry together while standing squarely on all the truths of Scripture as expressed by the Lutheran Confessions. At all times and in all we do our focus is the cross of Christ Jesus.

In planning for the future, the leaders of our synod not only desire to be good stewards but also recognize that they are responsible to the members, called workers, congregations, commissions, and boards of the synod. The leadership groups of our synod, in particular the Synodical Council (SC) and Conference of Presidents (COP), will continue to review the synod’s organizational structure so that it operates in the best and most appropriate way, fostering a spirit of unity, supporting the gospel ministry we carry out together, and making the most of every opportunity the Lord places before us. Therefore, we place all things confidently into the hands of our gracious God and make our plans in this working document in keeping with his revealed will.

FOUNDATION FOR LONG RANGE PLANNING – OUR PURPOSE

For the purpose of communicating to people inside and outside of our church body, the synod in convention has adopted this purpose statement:

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 for 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.

The focused purpose of our work as a corporate synod structure is summarized in our constitution:

The object and purpose of the synod shall be to extend and conserve the true doctrine and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church:

- a) By assisting and counseling in every appropriate way the pastors, teachers, and congregations affiliated with the synod;*
- b) By establishing and maintaining theological seminaries, colleges, academies, schools, and other institutions of learning;*
- c) By establishing and maintaining home and world missions and such charitable institutions as it may deem appropriate to its calling;*

- d) *By printing, publishing, purchasing, selling, and disseminating literature that maintains Lutheran doctrine and practice;*
- e) *By furnishing appropriate literature for parish schools, Sunday schools, missions, institutions, and churches.*

For the purposes of planning, of marshalling resources as good stewards of God's blessings, and of encouraging unity in spirit, the leaders of our synod have noted the constitutional priorities articulated by recent synod conventions and have summarized the purpose of our work as a synod with this planning guide:

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to give all glory to God by upholding, defending, and proclaiming the truth of the Holy Scriptures as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions, and by providing a means for congregations and their members to extend the reach of their God-given mission of proclaiming the gospel in Word and Sacrament through joint mission efforts at home and abroad and through the training of called workers.

LONG RANGE PLANS – THE PICTURE IN 2017

Worldwide Identity as Confessional Lutherans

As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we note the realignment of confessional Lutherans in North America and beyond so that by 2017:

- WELS will be known as a confessional Lutheran church body, firmly founded on the Holy Scriptures and joyfully proclaiming the saving love of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible around the globe.

World Missions

Recognizing the need for billions of souls to hear the gospel, by 2017, the Board for World Missions (BWM) will:

- have a world mission team (from administration to national churches) that agrees on a scriptural understanding of missiological terms, philosophy and implementation.
- have six regional seminaries (4 in 2010), ten national theological professors (3 in 2010), ten functional Bible Institutes (8 in 2010), and regular curricula supplemented by distance learning.
- be publishing at least 1/3 of the necessary course materials in at least 20 languages.
- operate in 30 countries (23 in 2010).
- serve over 150,000 souls worldwide (107,000 in 2010).

Home Missions

Recognizing that the process of encouraging, enhancing, establishing, developing and enriching missions in North America involves partnerships with congregations, groups and individuals, by 2017, the Board for Home Missions (BHM) will:

- open 10 new missions a year (4 in 2010).
- start 40 new ministry enhancements a year (10 in 2010).
- subsidize mission efforts in 200 congregations (150 in 2010), with ten missions and 40 ministry enhancements going self-supporting every year.

Ministerial Education

Mindful of the precious Lutheran heritage of the unconditional gospel that has been passed to our generation with remarkable clarity, by 2017, the Board for Ministerial Education (BME) will:

- graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) approximately 30 pastor candidates annually (42 in 2010), reflecting the actual number of pastor-track students already enrolled in 2010 at MLC, allowing an approximately 10% vacancy rate in our parishes (5% in 2010).
- graduate from Martin Luther College (MLC) approximately 50 teacher candidates (50 in 2010) who can serve anywhere annually, allowing every Early Childhood Center, Lutheran Elementary School, and area Lutheran

High School to be staffed by synodically-certified directors, principals and teachers. There will be 40 additional graduates annually who can serve only in limited geographic locations (40 in 2010).

- graduate from MLC staff minister candidates and laymen who meet the needs of local congregations.
- in collaboration with the COP and Congregation and Ministry Support Group (CMSG), have in place for all ministerial education schools self-supporting continuing education courses in a wide variety of formats for called workers, with a strong component of equipping the saints for the strengthening of local congregations.
- have working relationships between WLS, MLC, Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Luther Preparatory School (LPS), and Home and World Missions to supply the needs of each of our mission fields, home and abroad, and our sister churches in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC).

Congregation and District Ministry

Recognizing the vital importance of congregational health and the impact of called workers growing spiritually, personally, and professionally, by 2017, the COP and the CMSG will collaborate with WLS and MLC to provide counsel, resources, and training for all congregations to:

- strive for an increasing percentage of participation in worship and Bible study.
- improve assimilation, fellowship (relationships and meaningful connections) and service opportunities in church and community, with an emphasis on Christian vocation.
- strengthen the overall quality of education, specifically instruction and leadership, in our early childhood centers, Lutheran elementary schools (LES), area Lutheran high schools, and other children's ministries, so that they demonstrate excellence in both nurture and outreach.
- find ways to connect with the people of their communities and make use of outreach opportunities to share Jesus' love with as many people as possible, including those with special needs.
- support formal and informal programs for the spiritual, personal, and professional growth of called workers.
- support the work of the synod with 10-15% of offerings for Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) (8%, 2010), with 100% of congregations participating (92% in 2010).
- reflect synodical unity and vitality in all aspects of congregational practices.

Resources

It is the stated goal of WELS leadership and the synod in convention to have Congregation Mission Offerings serve as the primary source of financial support for synodical ministries. In order to carry out the plans and goals listed in this long range plan, under God's blessing and by his grace alone by 2017 we pray that our total synodical budget will be \$38 million per fiscal year with \$30 million of that coming from Congregation Mission Offerings (\$22.7 million in fiscal year 2009-10).

Resource Allocation

With the direction of recent synods in convention, and flowing from the plans above, in 2017:

- Missions will utilize 40-45% of CMO and Financial Stability Fund (FSF) resources (40% in 2010).
- Ministerial Education will utilize 30-35% of CMO and FSF resources (30% in 2010).
- Congregation and District Ministry will utilize 10-15% of CMO and FSF resources (14% in 2010).
- Ministry Support will utilize 10-15% of CMO and FSF resources (16%, including 5% debt retirement, in 2010).

STRATEGIES TO REACH LONG RANGE PLANS

Worldwide Identity as Confessional Lutherans

In the years leading up to 2017, WELS will:

- clearly and consistently express ourselves to the world as confessional Lutheran in doctrine and practice.
- maintain communication with the church bodies of the CELC and seek out the fellowship of other confessional Lutheran churches around the world.

- make every effort to identify confessional Lutherans in the United States and to rejoice in doctrinal unity when such unity can be determined.

World Missions

In the years leading up to 2017, the BWM will:

- enter new fields as God gives the opportunity.
- work with Home Missions and Ministerial Education to build awareness of the Church's mission to the lost and support of World Missions work among called workers and constituency.
- work with Ministerial Education to develop a worldwide ministerial education system on the model of basic Christian instruction, then Bible Institute, then seminary.
- publish foundational materials at all levels of theological development in as many targeted languages as possible.
- streamline administration and increase joint planning with other administrative units.

Home Missions

In the years leading up to 2017, the BHM will:

- prioritize funding with a balance of immediate opportunities and targeted efforts for long-range impact.
- streamline the communication, support structure and resources in the field and in the offices.
- provide proactive assistance and strategies to reach the lost with the gospel.
- mentor new personnel in mission settings.
- partner with World Missions, Ministerial Education, and other leaders to communicate the urgency for outreach and to develop helpful tools and resources.

Ministerial Education

In the years leading up to 2017, the BME will provide coordination, stressing efficiency and fiduciary responsibility, as:

- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) and Martin Luther College (MLC) graduate students who are confessional in stance, evangelical in approach, mission-minded in spirit, culturally sensitive, appropriately flexible, and zealous to nurture and to equip the saints.
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) and Luther Preparatory School (LPS) graduate students prepared to succeed at Martin Luther College.
- MLC continues to recruit students from prep schools, area Lutheran high schools, public schools, and adults in our fellowship considering another career.
- MLC expands its efforts in the training of principals, early childhood directors, and early childhood workers.
- the ministerial education schools expand their efforts in continuing education of called workers, education of international students for service in their ethnic groups of origin, and education of laity for service in the congregation.

Congregation and District Ministry

Recognizing the emphases in this area changing to "training the trainers," in the years leading up to 2017, the COP will:

- foster the ministries of the CMSG(the Commissions on Congregational Counseling, Worship, Evangelism, Adult Discipleship, Youth Discipleship, and Special Ministries) to provide counsel, resources, and training to congregations and all called workers.
- foster the ministry of the Commission on Lutheran Schools to provide training, assistance, expertise, and resources for the precious and valuable resources we have in our early childhood ministries, Lutheran elementary schools, and area Lutheran high schools.
- work with WLS, MLC and the CMSG to foster spiritual , personal and professional growth for all called workers through flexible programs of continuing education and mentoring, in order to equip, empower, and encourage lay members in their vocations and in volunteer service for their congregations.
- establish a committee to publish a new hymnal by the 500th anniversary of the first Lutheran hymnal (1524).

- work with all congregations to increase CMO using the 10/10 plan.
- work with parasynodicals to enlist and coordinate their support roles in funding and ministry.

Resources

In order to reach an annual fiscal budget of \$38 million in 2017, plans will be put in motion which will rely solely on the grace of God and his promises of undeserved love through Christ Jesus and will be applied to the hearts of God's people through a carefully organized every-member visit for every member of the WELS. The plans will offer specifics on how to do that in every congregation of the WELS – tailored for small, middle-sized, and large congregations. The plans will feature materials that will be brief but pointedly directing all to the “why” of joyful and generous financial stewardship – the cross and empty tomb of Jesus – and will include the “how to” of joyful and generous financial stewardship through a percentage of income offered, through special gifts (a possible “special offering for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation), and through deferred giving (estate planning).

Leadership

In the years leading up to 2017, the SC and COP will continue to work together to make the most of opportunities the Lord is placing before us. Issues “on the table” include:

- reviewing church governance issues (process and function of synod conventions, boards, size of SC, etc.).
- reviewing the size and number of districts, the size of circuits, possible term limits for district officials.
- reviewing the size and efficiency of synod technology, communication, and fiscal support offices.
- emphasizing continuing education for all called workers.
- encouraging collaboration in synodical support and ministerial endeavors.
- continuously updating the strategic plan so that the process continues beyond 2017.