

**Report of the President of the Nebraska District of WELS to the 54<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention  
Held at Embassy Suites, Kansas City International Airport  
June 3-5, 2024**

St. Peter's Christ-centered words were at the center of our opening worship today. And he'll continue to ground and guide our work together in the next couple days. We, as a people who have ancestors in the faith and who we pray have descendants also in the faith, are grounded in our resurrected and living Lord with a living hope—this is the certain promise of God. In Him, we know who we are and we know why we're here and where we're going.

Jesus Christ, rejected by mankind, denied by Peter, betrayed by one of His own, chosen as The Living Stone. We, built up in Him as Living stones. Brick by brick.

Our neighbors among whom we are to live and move and have our being—being in the world, but not of it—are as enslaved as each of us naturally is to a sandy and dead stone at base and then live sandy, un-alive lives next to others, grumbling, complaining, in open conflict or being sneaky and passive/aggressive.

Born of the Spirit's work that brings the foolishness of Christ preached into our ears and hearts, we trust only in Him and because we do, we give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. So many busy things that can be done. So many good things in a church that can be done. Which ones does this group—your group/congregation—choose to work on together for the good of the body and for the good of the neighbors in your part of the world? That's what our faithful brother and first Vice President, Steve Helwig, will help us work on here at our convention. Practical. Focused. Christ-centered and helping each of our congregations make a faithful plan and then work the faithful plan. Christ at the center of the Church's work doesn't mean we proclaim to the empty closet and somehow think the work of the Church has been accomplished. It always is to be through the lips of a faithful servant into the ears of actual humans who regularly gather to spur each other on to love and good deeds—with each part going back into each of his or her vocations, set free to live in trust under God and in love toward the neighbor. And yet we also do some things together as the body. Which ones?

Let it not be said that district conventions are not practical. I pray that this one is as clearly received as grounded in Christ and practically helpful for us as each of our congregations go forward.

One of the issues before our synod (and therefore before us as a district, according to how Committee #10 and Chairman Pastor Mike Quandt wishes us to address it) is the need for workers in the harvest field. "The harvest is plentiful," Jesus said to His disciples. "But the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest," (Mt 9:37-38; Lk 10:2). It was a trustworthy saying in Jesus' day. It's trustworthy two millennia later. *There's too much to do for so few people, for so few Called workers. There aren't enough students who are preparing for candidacy for the public ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are too many vacancies. There aren't enough Lutheran teachers. There aren't enough pastors.*

If we trust in princes or in men, we will find plenty of reasons to decide that this organization isn't successful enough. But if we trust that the Living Lord, Jesus, is the Lord of the Church and if we trust that it has always been His will that His Church is built on Word & Sacrament that is served by sinful humans to sinful humans, we'll have a different way to gauging success—faithfulness. The clay-pot nature of the Church's servants will always be clay pot. But that's so that the all-surpassing power be of God. *And not of us.*

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*Our district's constitution says: "The district shall supervise doctrine (teaching) and practice in the district, receive new congregations into the district, receive pastors and male teachers into the district, conduct elections in the district, review and provide reaction to the reports of the synod president on the activities of the synod on behalf of the membership, and conduct discipline and bear appeals within the district" (Article III, Purpose of the Nebraska District).*

So, we're here at this place and at this time to focus on what that last paragraph states. There will be some very nice solid doctrinal and practical work going on as we're led by Pastor Helwig who is uniquely gifted and qualified to help our congregations think this through and work on it. We'll accept new pastors and male teachers into the district, thereby quietly and faithfully underlining a timeless truth—that the Lord's Church is to be served and led and taught by men of the Spirit. We'll conduct elections in the district, without the kind of polarized politics that emphasizes me first, but in a "let the Call seek the man" kind of spirit. Those who will be Called to serve will know—and so will the rest of us—that they are serving in the Lord's name and in the Church's name in good order.

And we will "review and provide reactions to the reports of the synod president (that's what the RTTD is) on the activities of the synod on behalf of the membership." Each congregation of our church body, through its delegate, gets to actually hear from the synod's president (via the RTTD) and then give him and our synodical leadership feedback on the work that we're doing together in our Lord's name.

### **Specifics**

We'll continue a tradition in the election of our circuit pastors tomorrow morning: each of our circuits will elect its circuit pastor by first writing nominations on paper, then voting for the circuit pastor on paper. The circuit pastor's role matters; the election of those men should not be too quick or hasty.

There is a proposal for our synod to change from its familiar biennial convention format to a triennial convention format. Our Committee #3, led by Chairman Pastor Nathaniel Biebert, will help us think carefully and react helpfully to the proposal.

We'll hear reports from some of our synodical or district servants. Our committees will possibly make use of those men by asking them specific questions in committee meetings. Each committee will give us its take on the specific area of the synod's work and we'll each get a chance to react to each committee's work.

We'll hear Committee #13's report suggesting a way forward for our district conventions and district dues that reflect the kind of convention we want to have. Part of our district dues question will be to consider how many of our Called Workers have been being served by the service of Christian Family Solutions. It seems wise to not cut the part of the budget that supports such health for our servants. God bless 13's work.

At the beginning of this convention, let it be said that I am especially grateful for two groups—the lay delegates who care enough about the gospel ministry of our synod to come here. And for the work of our praesidium members, Pastors Phil Kieselhorst, Tyler Peil, and Steve Helwig who is our convention coordinator, organizer and planner. And presenter, this time around. God bless our humble (as to ourselves) and bold (in Christ) labors in His name.

## **Statistical Report of the Nebraska District President**

I respectfully ask that the following be ratified by the convention through Floor Committee #1. Where information is incomplete or if additions need to be made, please provide the necessary data to Floor Committee #1.

### **District Statistics from June 1, 2022 to June 1, 2024**

#### **Pastoral Ordinations/Installations**

1. Pastor Justin Wilkens, Bethel Lutheran Church, York, NE, 7/1/2022
2. Pastor David Young, Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Martin, SD 7/1/2023
3. Pastor Jared Lindemann, Fount of Life Lutheran Church, Colorado Springs, CO 7/1/2023

### **Pastor/Vicar Installations**

4. Pastor Joshua Hillmann, First Lutheran Church, Aurora, NE 7/1/2022
5. Pastor David Boettcher, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Salt Lake City, UT 7/1/2022
6. Vicar Clayton Fury, Christ Lutheran Church, Denver, CO 8/01/2022
7. Vicar Duane Backhaus, Zion Lutheran Church, Denver, CO 8/1/2022
8. Pastor Matthew Hennig, Living Word Lutheran Church, Montrose, CO 11/1/2022
9. Pastor Stephen Koelpin, CrossView Lutheran Church, Windsor, CO 1/1/2023
10. Pastor Jacob Jenswold, Victory Lutheran Church, Wichita KS 1/1/2023
11. Pastor Martin Valleskey, Abiding Word Lutheran Church, Highlands, Ranch, CO 6/1/2023
12. Pastor Benjamin Ehlers, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Grand Junction, CO 7/1/2023
13. Pastor Daniel Schmidt Jr., Hope Lutheran Church, Manhattan, KS 7/1/2023
14. Vicar Daniel Husi, Zion Lutheran Church, Denver, CO 8/1/2023
15. Vicar Malachi Mortensen, Gethsemane Lutheran School, Omaha, NE 8/1/2023
16. Vicar Benjamin Roekle, Christ Lutheran Church, Denver, CO 8/1/2023
17. Pastor James Winterstein, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Salina, KS 11/1/2023

### **Male Teacher Commissionings/Installations**

1. Mr. Caleb Paul Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, NE 8/1/2022-6/30/2023
2. Mr. Justus Kupsky, Zion Lutheran School, Valentine, NE 7/1/2022-6/30/2024
3. Mr. Noah Worster, Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, NE 7/1/2023-6/30/2024

### **Male Teacher Installations**

1. Staff Minister Daniel Kleist, Eternal Rock Lutheran, Castle Rock CO 8/1/2023
2. Mr. Paul Kanzenbach, Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, NE 7/1/2022
3. Mr. Levi Dunsmoor, Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, CO 7/1/2022
4. Mr. Frederick Lohmiller, Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, NE 7/1/2023-6/30/2024
5. Mr. Kevin Hahm, St. Mark Lutheran School, Lincoln, NE 7/1/2023
6. Mr. Joshua Glowicki, Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, CO 7/1/2023

### **Female Teachers Installations**

1. Samantha Paul, Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, CO 7/1/2022
2. Mrs. Rylee Quandt, Our Precious Lambs, Omaha, NE 7/1/2022-6/30/2023
3. Mrs. Lauren Fury, Lord of Life Lutheran School, Thorton, CO 7/1/2022-6/30/2023
4. Mrs. Livia Backhaus, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran School, Westminster, CO 7/1/2022-6/30/2023
5. Mrs. Tessa Koeppel, Immanuel Lutheran School, Hadar, NE 7/1/2022-8/16/2023
6. Mrs. Jessie Hunt, Gethsemane Lutheran School, Omaha NE 7/1/2022
7. Ms. Jana Borchardt, Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, CO 7/1/2022
8. Mrs. Sarah Boettcher Prince of Peace Lutheran School, Taylorsville, UT 7/1/2022
9. Mrs. Jennifer Hartzell, Shining Stars Learning Center, Colorado Springs, CO 11/1/2022
10. Mrs. Mollie Roekle, Lord of Life Lutheran, Thronton, CO 7/1/2023-6/30/2024
11. Mrs. Kimberly Frey, St. Paul Lutheran School, Plymouth, NE 7/1/2023
12. Mrs. Elizabeth Myers, St. Mark Lutheran School, Lincoln NE 7/1/2023
13. Miss Stephanie Ham, Mt. Olive Lutheran School, Overland Park, KS 7/1/2023
14. Mrs. Rebecca Pederson, Our Precious Lambs, Omaha, NE 7/1/2023

15. Mrs. Violet Brucker, Lord of Life Lutheran, Thornton, CO 7/1/2023
16. Ms. Kaylene Fisbeck, Little Lambs Preschool, Fort Collins, CO 7/1/2023
17. Miss Jenna Kassen, Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, CO 7/1/2023
18. Mrs. Lisa Hoover, Zion Lutheran School, Denver, CO 7/1/2023
19. Mrs. Jennifer Nelson, Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, CO 7/1/2023
20. Miss Rachel Gresock, Prince of Peache Lutheran School, Taylorsville, UT 7/19/2023
21. Mrs. Madeline Jenswold, Loving Arms Child Care Center, Wichita, KS 8/27/2023

**Transfers are recorded by the synod president's office and, therefore, not reported here anymore.**

#### **Retirements**

1. Pastor Jeffrey Berg, 43 years of service
2. Pastor Mark Gefaller, 11 years of service
3. Pastor Mark Haefner 42 years of service
4. Pastor Dennis Strong, 40 years of service
5. Mr. Steven Bremer 35 years of service
6. Mrs. Linda Mullen 32 years of service

#### **Pastor Resignations**

Pastor Timothy Kemnitz, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Lincoln, NE

#### **Teacher Resignations**

1. Miss Anastasia Bornschlegl Zion Lutheran School, Valentine, NE LES
2. Mrs. Katharine Bremer, Waco, NE NELHS
3. Mrs. Jessica Frey Living Word Lutheran, Montrose, CO, ECM
4. Miss Jessica Mau, Little Lambs Preschool, Fort Collins, CO ECM
5. Mrs. Carolyn Pacini, Little Lambs Preschool, Fort Collins, CO ECM
6. Mrs. Stephanie Peitsmeyer St. Mark Lutheran School, Lincoln, NE LES

#### **District Appointments**

1. Mr. Steven B Bremer, Board of Appeals Member
2. Pastor Steven R Kahrs, Board of Appeals Chairman
3. Mr. Kyle Swogger, Board of Appeals Member
4. Mr. Paul Claflin, CO Mission Board Financial Secretary
5. Mr. Matthew Dettmann, CO Mission Board BHM Representative
6. Mr. Eric Myers, CO Mission Board Member
7. Pastor Brett Krause, CO Mission Board Chairman
8. Pastor Jared Oldenburg, CO Mission Board Secretary
9. Pastor Timothy Spiegelberg, CO Mission Board Member
10. Mrs. Amanda Petersen, Commission on Lutheran Schools Early Childhood Coordinator
11. Pastor Kevin Stellick, Commission on Special Ministries Coordinator
12. Pastor Daniel Bondow, Commission on Worship Coordinator
13. Pastor Jason Schulz, Commission on Worship Member
14. Pastor Nathaniel Winkel, Committee on Constitutional Matters Chairman
15. Pastor Nathaniel Biebert, Committee on Constitutional Matters Member
16. Pastor Kevin Klug, Ministry of Christian Giving Chairman
17. Pastor Matthew Scharf, NE Mission Board Financial Secretary
18. Mr. Michael Gray, NE Mission Board Member

19. Pastor Aaron Schumann, NE Mission Board Secretary
20. Mr. Dallas Christ, NE Mission Board Financial Secretary
21. Pastor Jordan Bence, NE Mission Board Member
22. Pastor Timothy Westendorf, Nominating Committee Western Conference
23. Pastor David Wietzke, Nominating Committee Chairman
24. Pastor Justin Dauck, Nominating Committee Eastern Conference
25. Pastor Philip Henning, Nominating Committee Eastern Conference

### **Church Closings**

1. Zion Lutheran Church, Mission, SD 1/1/1915-7/24/2023
2. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Las Animas, CO 1/1/1955-7/24/2023

### **School Closings**

1. Hope Lutheran Early Learning Center, Manhattan, KS 7/1/2005-2/29/2024
2. Immanuel Lutheran School, Hadar, NE 1883-2024
3. Zion, Valentine, NE 1943-2024

### **New Missions/Schools**

1. Gethsemane Lutheran ECM, Omaha NE, 7/1/2022
2. Victory Lutheran Church, Wichita, KS 8/4/2022
3. CrossView Lutheran Church, Windsor, CO 10/25/2022
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### **In memory of those who served in the Nebraska District and are now at rest with our Lord**

1. Pastor Robert Strawn, 1/22/2024
2. Pastor Allen Capek, 9/11/2023
3. Pastor Timm Meyer, 2/28/2024

### **WELS Assignment Committee Work**

#### **1. Assignment Comparisons with previous years**

At MLC this year, 45 men graduated in the preseminary program (37 in 2023, 48 in 2022, 35 in 2021), all 45 with a Bachelor of Arts degree (34 in 2023, 47 in 2022, 33 in 2021) and no one with Seminary Certification (3 in 2023, 1 in 2022, 2 in 2021).

In the Assignment Committee at MLC this year, there were 72 (61 in 2023, 74 in 2022, 92 in 2021) teacher candidates who could go anywhere (58 from the graduating class and 14 from previous years), and all of them were assigned. In addition, 23 teacher candidates who were limited geographically received Calls, and 36 teacher candidates returned for another year to their current place of service, for a total of 131 candidates assigned (138 in 2023, 125 in 2022, 168 in 2021). After the Assignment Committee met, there were still 115 total vacancies for teacher-trained men and women synod-wide (at least 158 at this time in 2023, 140 in 2022, 90 in 2021). Of those 115, 93 had brought Calls to the Assignment Committee that went unfilled.

At MLC, 5 Staff Ministry candidates were available for assignment, and all of them were assigned.

In the Assignment Committee at WLS this year, there were 97 requests for candidates (116 in 2023, 90 in 2022, 74 in 2021). There were 27 candidates available (42 in 2023, 27 in 2022, 33 in 2021), and all of them were assigned, so 70 of those Calls were unfilled (74 in 2023, 63 in 2022, 41 in 2021). Of

those 27 candidates, 26 were seniors receiving their first Call and 1 was from a previous class. In addition, 5 men were reassigned to one-year Calls. After the Assignment Committee did its work, there were still 146 vacancies for pastor-trained parish men synod-wide (140 in 2023, 136 in 2022, 95 in 2021), a 12% vacancy rate.

After vicars were assigned at WLS this year, 7 vicars' wives received one-year Calls to teach.

2. As reported in the RTTD, the COP will be releasing a pastoral brief on the Scriptures' teaching of man and woman. The plan is to have the brief be released in time to inform the kind of work many congregations are doing on especially their by-laws.
3. **WELS Leadership Conference**—as reported in RTTD, the next one is planned for January, 2025. We look forward to recommendations from Committee #13 as we look forward to the next conferences in our district, regardless of the biennial/triennial convention question.
4. **Calling Window for teachers** during the 2024-25 school year will again be mid October til mid April. This shift to the Call window has been most helpful for schools as they ask the Lord for staffing in the next school year. A special thanks goes to 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Phil Kieselhorst who is bird-dogging the ministry certification of all one-year, renewable and provisionally Called servants. And we continue to thank the Lord for the faithful and effective labors of MLC as they retro-fit servants ministerially speaking.

It is wise for us all to assure that the servants who are speaking in the name of the Lord and of His Church are actually well-qualified to do that. We thank God for all the first-career Lutheran teaching ministers that the Lord has given us all these years. We also thank God for all those who are coming to candidacy for faithful gospel ministry in the Church in other faithful and orderly on-ramps.

5. **Self-Assessment Forms**--If you have not done so recently, please take a few moments to update your record at WELS through the revised online process. This is especially needed to update your personal and family information, as well as assessment information. This updated information helps district presidents and the Lutheran Schools office prepare call lists and helps to ensure that the biographical information shared at such meetings is as accurate as possible. You also have the opportunity to write a paragraph about your ministry goals and interests, as well as any other personal or congregational information that would be helpful for district presidents to be aware of. You may also list your top five strengths (Strengthfinders). Go to this link to update your information: <https://cloud.wels.net/my-wels-cloud/>.
6. **Retiring Pastors & Teachers, or those who are thinking about it in the next half decade:** It is not wise or good to surprise your congregation or school with a sudden departure from ministry. Please accept this invitation to speak with me about your thoughts regarding the years ahead, Lord willing. There is much demand for those who are willing to serve for a limited time (three months at a time, for example; or six months, or more) and in areas where you are willing to spend that time. At the same time, it has been stated that a portion of a strategy for doing all we wish to do in our Lord's name in the coming years is for servants to think of serving into their 70's. Of course, if one is serving that long, it is not assumed that the load one can carry well is exactly the same load as one was carrying in earlier years.