



# Κηρυξάτε PREACH THE GOSPEL

A MAGAZINE OF WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY



## DUAL CITIZENSHIP





## 2024–25 EVENTS

<b>AUGUST 21</b>	Opening Service
<b>SEPTEMBER 16</b>	WLS Alumni Society Annual Meeting
<b>SEPTEMBER 16–17</b>	WLS Symposium
<b>OCTOBER 12</b>	Friends of the Seminary Day
<b>DECEMBER 8</b>	Christmas Concert
<b>JANUARY 6–17</b>	Winterim
<b>FEBRUARY 4–6</b>	Mission and Ministry
<b>MAY 22</b>	Call Day and Graduation Concert
<b>MAY 23</b>	Graduation



### EDITOR'S NOTE

Christians have “dual citizenship,” living in two kingdoms at the same time—the church and the world. Both are kingdoms ruled by our gracious God, yet each one operates differently in some ways. Several of the articles in this issue depict members of the seminary family as they live and work in both kingdoms, all for the glory of God.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- † Thank you to the authors who contributed to this issue.
- † Special thanks to Lori Guse, who serves as mission advancement coordinator and provided all seminary photographs, and to Barbara Rickaby, the seminary’s communications coordinator.

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# Commendation From “Outsiders”

Sometimes an outsider sees things an insider misses.

The insider may so accommodate himself to his surroundings that he becomes oblivious to problems an outsider immediately notices. Conversely, familiarity may lead the insider to become so fixated on weaknesses that he fails to recognize strengths.

One of the reasons Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) decided to pursue accreditation was a desire to have outside eyes look at its overall program. The seminary’s governing board and the faculty, desiring to improve in their synod-assigned work of preparing men for service as pastors in WELS, sought out an accrediting agency to provide an objective assessment of the seminary’s work.

The seminary applied for, and was granted, associate membership in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in 2018. At present more than 270 graduate schools of theology across North America hold membership in ATS. The association, with headquarters in Pittsburgh, aims to “promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.”

The primary way ATS promotes excellence in theological education is through the accreditation process. When ATS granted WLS associate membership in 2018, the expectation was that WLS would complete the accreditation process within five years. Unfortunately, a pandemic delayed the completion of a readiness report, the first step in the process for a school seeking initial accreditation. A committee chaired by Dr. Kenneth Cherney, Jr., completed the readiness report in spring 2021, a year later than originally anticipated. That readiness report received approval from ATS and WLS was granted permission to move forward with the next step in



the accreditation process: a self-study. Before “outsiders” could ever assess the work being done at WLS, the “insiders” had a lot of work to do. The faculty and governing board needed to take a hard look at the seminary’s program on their own, evaluating the work being done in light of the association’s ten standards, which “articulate principles of quality for graduate theological education that all schools meet in various ways.” The recently revised standards, adopted by ATS in 2020, moved away from a focus on specific best practices every accredited school should have to a principles-based approach, which allows schools to meet the standards in different ways according to their institutional context.

Three subcommittees, consisting of seminary professors, met regularly to consider how WLS met the standards and where there were opportunities to improve. Discussion of issues took place both in small groups and in

plenary faculty meetings. The conversations raised during the process proved helpful and led to the identification of concrete steps to be taken toward improvement. The many hours of self-study culminated in a self-study report that arrived at the ATS offices on December 1, 2023.

The self-study report and supplemental materials referenced in the report were then shared with a visitation team appointed by Dr. Stephen Graham, director of accreditation with the Commission on Accrediting and the seminary’s liaison with ATS. The four members of the visitation team, all of whom serve at other ATS seminaries and participated in the visit as volunteers, thoroughly reviewed the report and the supplemental materials in preparation for their on-site visit.

The visitation team arrived on campus on April 16 for two full days of meetings and conversations with administrators, governing board members, professors, students, and mem-

bers of the staff. They asked thoughtful questions that demonstrated their careful preparation. Their goal was to evaluate what had been written in the self-study report, to see if reality matched what they had read.

Before leaving campus on April 18, the visitation team shared a brief report. The team offered glowing comments about what they had observed. They encouraged seminary leaders not to take for granted the distinctive strengths WLS enjoys, things not found in every seminary. First, they noted “the clarity and extraordinary affirmation and ownership of the school’s mission by seminary personnel and the WELS.” The synod’s confidence in the seminary and the seminary’s commitment to carrying out the task assigned by the synod stood out to them as special blessings to be treasured.

A second distinctive strength they observed was the seminary’s solid financial situation. Generous support of the seminary from the synod in the form of annual subsidy of nearly \$900k and from a large group of individuals who give regularly to the seminary enables the support of a beautiful campus and well-maintained facilities. The visitation team noted with approval the generous tuition assistance students receive and the investment made in the professional development of professors as they pursue advanced degrees.

The third distinctive strength the team noted was a “strong sense of joyful community and shared purpose throughout the seminary with a very high level of student satisfaction.” The members of the team came away impressed with the students they met. The Lord has blessed WLS with students that are extremely well-prepared for their studies because of

the excellent work done by Martin Luther College, not just academically, but spiritually. The Holy Spirit continues to form students through the living and active Word of God at the center of life together in a residential seminary. Daily face-to-face interaction between professors and students plays a crucial role in the formation of gospel-oriented pastors.

The fourth distinctive strength the “outsiders” observed was the “deep commitment to the model of ‘pastors training pastors.’” The seminary’s current tagline, “Pastors forming pastors to proclaim God’s praise,” isn’t just a tagline. Students, faculty, and staff all clearly understand that WLS exists to prepare pastors for service in WELS. The visitation team expressed appreciation for the governing board’s commitment to calling professors who have significant experience in pastoral ministry. Men who know and love the work of pastoral ministry are well equipped to encourage and prepare future pastors. Members of the visitation team even suggested that this was a practice WLS might encourage other ATS institutions to implement.

Based on their visit, the team officially recommended that the ATS Board of Commissioners grant an initial accreditation of seven years, the maximum number of years that can be granted for an initial accreditation. Members of the visitation team explained that their recommendation should be viewed as strong approval of the program. At the same time, they also required the submission of two reports to address areas needing

improvement or further information. The first report, due April 2026, should address evaluation of institutional outcomes, including a review and evaluation of organizational structures, review of workloads, and updating of position descriptions. The second report, due November 2027, is to provide a simple, systematic, and sustainable evaluation of student learning outcomes. The visitation team made it clear that additional reports are regularly required; that only two were required, they emphasized, should be considered commendation of the work being done.

The ATS Board of Commissioners met in early June to consider the visitation team’s report. They concurred with the recommendation and granted an initial accreditation for



a period of seven years, with the next comprehensive evaluation visit in spring 2031. God be praised!

The accreditation process has revealed opportunities to strengthen the seminary’s program. It has also surfaced reasons to thank the Lord for blessings that “outsiders” have observed and highlighted. †

*Earle Treptow serves as president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and teaches courses in systematic theology.*



# In Service to the Lord

Selfless service, sacrifice, strong relationships, and requirements to go where one is called—are all things that military service and ministry have in common. Members of our military are ready to give up their lives for the many freedoms we enjoy in this country. Ministry workers serve by putting the needs of others above their own, to share the freedom we have in Christ. Military members, ministry workers, and their families make great sacrifices to protect and share these freedoms. There is a deep bond built between military members. They go through things that only other service members can relate to; they fight similar battles at home and abroad. In Christ we have fellowship with one another; we have an understanding and worldview unlike any other. Active-duty service members are told where to live and serve, in some ways similar to the call process our pastors go through. Because of these close similarities, our experiences in the military have strongly impacted and prepared us for ministry and given us a unique perspective on the two kingdoms in which Christians find themselves.

We met at the Military School of Music in 2011. Shawn joined the active-duty Marine Corps, went to training, and was stationed with the 2nd MAW Band in North



Carolina. Amy joined the Army National Guard and returned to her home of South Dakota to finish her music education degree at Northern State University and serve her state in the 147th Army Band South Dakota National Guard. In 2013, Amy transferred to the 440th Army Band North Carolina National Guard. We married in November of 2013. Fast forward to today. Shawn is a student at the seminary, and Amy is a member of the 132nd Army Band Wisconsin National Guard. Amy also works with the Wisconsin Honor Guard, performing military funeral honors for veterans and their families.

We live temporarily as citizens in this world God created for us, interacting with the people around us, working under our government, and living in the countries where God has placed us. There is also a spiritual kingdom. This kingdom is eternal and, as Christians, we have peace because through faith we know that we are citizens of Christ's kingdom. Sometimes these two kingdoms seem far from each other. Other times, they seem to overlap. This has been especially evident in our lives as we served (and continue to serve) in the US Military and now as Shawn prepares for public ministry.

In addition to all the similarities mentioned at the beginning of this article, the military provides a unique opportunity to share the gospel. We have both been able to have incredible scripture-filled conversations with soldiers and marines because of the built-in trust that comes with the bond only fellow service men and women have. There is also a deep and urgent need for the gospel because so many military members come face to face with the reality of death. While performing military funeral honors, Amy is frequently in an environment where both God's Word is being preached *and* military members are serving side-by-side; it is not uncommon for religion to come up in conversation with her co-workers.

Military service has shown us that sometimes the temporary, earthly kingdom and the eternal kingdom of God can overlap. Our time in the military has prepared us for public ministry and given us unique opportunities to share the gospel. Conversely, being a Christian and studying God's Word daily has helped in our military service by teaching us about sacrifice and servant leadership. What better example do we have than our Lord Jesus Christ? †

*Shawn and Amy Marron and their family live in Milwaukee as Shawn continues his studies at the seminary.*



# Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's

## Financial Seminars at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Pastors are eager to share the powerful truths of God's word with the world. Pastors are eager gently and lovingly to rebuke and encourage the brothers and sisters in Christ who are part of their Christian family. Pastors are also eager to honor God in every aspect of their life, including in their interaction with the government.

The apostle Paul, as he was sharing God's truth with his Roman brothers and sisters, wrote, "Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Romans 13:7). Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary presents seminars each year for all our students, helping them understand how to carry out financial responsibilities to government specifically as well as for life in general.

All Americans have tax responsibility. Ministers of the gospel have tax rules that are unique to them. In some ways they are treated like workers who are self-employed. In other ways they are treated like a traditional employee who works for someone else. Social security rules are slightly different for pastors. Special deductions are allowed for purchases that support providing, furnishing, and caring for a home.

In addition to unique tax rules, there are more general tax rules that have specific applications to situations for pastors. How does one report money received in appreciation for conducting a wedding? If a congregation pays a pastor money for mileage, is there any part of that mileage expense that can still be deducted? While still a student, are scholarships ever taxable? If a grandma gives you a graduation gift, should you buy new theological books before or after you begin serving in your new congregation? Which tax rules affect a pastor's plan to save for retirement?

Tax law can feel overwhelming. A basic sense of the rules equips pastors to honor the Lord by honoring their government.

Financial seminars do not only touch on tax issues. Students explore the benefits of a budget, address debt, and learn about credit scores. Seminars discuss the purchasing of a home, the buying of a car, and the types of insurance available. Students consider basic investment strategies, key features of retirement planning, and the importance of wills and medical directives.

While so many aspects of earthly living are the focus, a constant theme runs through them all. Managing money is not an end in itself. We manage money because we want to be good stewards of all that God has given. Our goal is not outward earthly success. We want to make the most of all the opportunities God gives, being generous and eager to share. Our intent is not to take



advantage of the government. We are grateful for the blessings God brings through government and appreciate the incentives the government offers. Our end game is not simply financial stability. When finances are well managed, a pastor treasures the freedom to focus even more on what matters most, that eternal treasure to be enjoyed and shared.

Pastors are eager to seek first God's kingdom. They have the privilege of doing that as members of an earthly kingdom. May God help all of us be good managers of earthly matters, finding joy in pursuing eternal goals even with temporary things. †

*Steve Geiger serves as vice president and financial aid officer of the seminary, and he teaches courses in New Testament and education.*



# Listen, Learn, and Love

I am very fortunate to work with incredible women. Day in and day out, I am blessed to be in a position to support mothers as they work to build a secure future for themselves and their children. At New Beginnings – A Home for Mothers, we provide stable housing, necessities for the early stages of motherhood, and resources beneficial for life as a new mother. We also look to equip our residents for life after their time at New Beginnings through educational and career advancement, time to prepare for future independence, and a loving group of Christian supporters in their corner. My job as a case manager is only made possible by the motivated mothers with whom I spend my time. Having been trained as a teacher, I know from experience that teachers are constantly learning from the students in their classroom. I feel similarly about the women in our care. They bring an incredible work ethic, an eagerness to form a relationship with God, an openness to new perspectives, and a passionate desire to give everything they can to their children. My experiences with these women have helped me expand my understanding of what God commands of us in 1 John 4:11: “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Where the rubber meets the road in this ministry setting is navigating how God would like me to fulfill this command to love in such a complex and broken world. Some days I really wish God also conveniently included exact “what to do when...” instructions in his Word. God instead reminds me the best approach to serving the residents in my care is listen, learn, and love.

Listening is not always easy. Hurt, injustice, loss, and trauma are real and all-surrounding. But since this is the case, listening is all the more



crucial. A loving ear is of endless value, seeking to understand before seeking to be understood. It takes humility to recognize privilege and realize that tangible and environmental blessings are inherited by some and sought after by others. It is only through humility that one is able to genuinely appreciate how Christ chose to serve us.

As I listen, I learn how each mother has found herself on a unique path that led her to New Beginnings. The one similarity among the women is an intense desire to provide for their children physically, emotionally, and spiritually as best they can. This also means learning to provide for themselves to a degree that may be unfamiliar to them. My job exists because of our dual citizenship in both an earthly kingdom and a heavenly one. Food, water, stability, education, income, and the like are all essentials that cannot be ignored. With this being said, the only “riches” that will endure come from our Savior (2 Corinthians 8:9). I will be the first to admit that it

is easy to become overly concerned with things that we see and physically experience here on earth. There is good reason to spend time on money management, goal setting, meal planning, mental fortitude, physical health, and educational advancement. However, the meaning to such work is founded on thankfulness to God and a sure future in Him.

Our mission at New Beginnings revolves around service. As we listen to our residents and the members of our community, we learn how best to love them by providing for their physical needs. But most importantly, we cherish our opportunities to tend to the one need that all people share: the need for the gospel message of forgiveness through Jesus. †

*Emily Holz is married to Nathan Holz, a 2024 graduate of the seminary. New Beginnings was started in 1993 by Christian Life Resources, a WELS-affiliated ministry. Learn more at [homeformothers.com](http://homeformothers.com).*



# Practicing What You Preach

It all began in the spring of 2009. My older son asked me if I wanted to attend the Citizens' Police Academy conducted by the Mequon Police Department. These are programs that many police departments run that help citizens understand police work. It also helps the departments connect with the community. This sounded intriguing, so my son and I signed up and spent six evenings learning more about police work. These sessions included defense and arrest tactics, shoot and don't shoot scenarios on a big screen simulator, traffic stops,

I have often told WLS students to get involved in their community in some way, so it was time that I practiced what I preached. So, for about a decade I did police reserve work. This meant attending community events that required some form of police presence. It saved the department hours of work and included events that the sworn officers did not enjoy, such as parades; high school football, basketball, and hockey games; fun runs; bike races; and graduation services." Our tasks ranged from directing traffic to managing the

It was in the spring of 2018 that the State of Wisconsin offered a training program for police chaplains. The state recognized the challenges that officers faced and wanted to help. The police chief contacted me and asked if I would take the training and become a police chaplain. So, my role shifted from reserve work to chaplaincy work. My task was twofold. I was to support the officers in their work and meet with those who wanted a "safe" person to talk to. I also supported the community by being a calming presence when families in the community lost a loved one. This allowed the officers to do their investigative work and gather necessary information while I sat with the family members.

This work is not easy. The police culture is a closed unit, and it takes time to earn their trust. And being there with a family when their loved one has died can be painful. Yet it is something that pastors do as they minister to their flock, so the challenge was nothing new. It also gave me opportunities to witness to my Christian faith and even serve people in their spiritual lives. As police chaplains we are not allowed to proselytize. We have to maintain clear spiritual boundaries. However, we are free to answer any questions people raise about the Bible or the Christian faith and can pastor them at their request. As a result, I have ministered to the dying and conducted funerals for those who confessed the faith. However, as chaplains we do not have to do anything that conflicts with our Christian faith.

As you can see, it has been an interesting journey. It is one way that this pastor/professor sought to engage and serve the community in which he lives. †

*In addition to serving as campus counselor, John Schuetze teaches courses in pastoral theology and systematic theology.*



a canine demonstration, drug and alcohol identification, one-on-one use and instruction at a police shooting range, and simunition [simulated ammunition] exercises. It was an informative six weeks. Little did I know it was also a formative six weeks.

At the end of this program, the captain of the police reserves gave a presentation on the work of the reserves and invited those who were interested to join. I had never thought of getting involved in police work, but I ended up talking to the captain who convinced me to join the police reserves.

crowds. We wore uniforms that identified us as reserve officers and carried radios to call for sworn officers to deal with incidents.

The benefit of my reserve work is that I got out into the community, met the mayor and other local officials as well as general people around town. I got to explain the work of the seminary on various occasions. Many were curious about the beautiful place on the hill. One person thought we were a monastery. Such was my life as a reserve officer for about a decade.



# When a Seminary Graduate Comes to Town

**M**y assignment was to write an article answering, “What is it like for a group of Christians to welcome one of the seminary’s new graduates?”

Members of this southern congregation, however, saw the word “welcome” in that question and panicked a bit: “Oh no! Did we provide enough dinners? Did we ask our new arrivals if they needed anything? Should we have offered to babysit?”

Truthfully, Living Hope Lutheran Church in Midlothian, Virginia welcomed Pastor Alex Lindemann and his family with great excitement. Congregation, family, and friends gathered for ordination and installation. There were beautiful words, music, flowers, and a reception. Deserving special mention was the melt-in-your-mouth meat (yes, that’s literal meat, not spiritual) prepared by Living Hope’s own grill master.

Yet Pastor Lindemann outdid our southern hospitality tenfold. Having the benefit of watching many experienced pastors before him, he lovingly insisted on visits with every household of the congregation. What a cool idea! Instead of waiting for us to gather the nerve to invite, he came to our homes. That demonstration of love and confidence warmed our hearts!

Starting day one, Pastor Lindemann, his wife Rachel, and young children Ellie and Leo put in the caring work of making themselves comfortable members of the congregation. They put us at ease. They served us.

So, how do we respond to the privilege of enjoying one of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s finest? We are fall-on-our-face thankful. We remember God’s deep care and love for us sinners in calling workers to shepherd us.

A related digression. Thirty years ago, I was one of the many reasons WELS plants missions throughout the world. From infancy I attended church weekly. Religion class was five days a week through grade school. Yet at thirty-two years old I truly had no idea what Jesus had done for me. I truly did not know who Jesus was. And then, a young seminarian named Jon Kuske, fresh out of WLS, was sent to Midlothian, Virginia to start a mission church. By God’s hand I found myself in his Bible class.



Most of what he said made no sense to me for numerous weeks. But that young pastor resolutely and lovingly applied God’s Word to my unyielding, unknowing heart. At thirty-two years old I experienced an eternity-changing moment: first not understanding, and the next moment shocked with understanding! My heart changed and became new in Christ.

It is a wonder and a joy to witness God’s craftsmanship as we watch Pastor Lindemann at work. Our thankfulness extends to the many whom God used to prepare him. His seminary professors and his parents were on the front line. But there were also so many that God called to serve in the background, from childhood Sunday school teachers to a special groundskeeper at WLS, and so many more. We humbly thank God for the kaleidoscope of work that lovingly formed our pastor to serve.

We appreciate the precious value of the training that young men out of WLS bring to their new assignments. We remember the cost, paid on the cross, for these seminarians’ hearts, and for our hearts, rooted in Christ! And so we say, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Romans 10:14-15). †

*Rita McDonald is a member of Living Hope, Midlothian, Virginia. Pastor Alex Lindemann, a 2023 graduate of the seminary, was assigned to serve as associate pastor of Living Hope.*



# An Unexpected Call

It was an unexpected call . . . an unexpected nudge in the right direction.

Many people serving in the public ministry will reference a moment when they began to consider serving God as a pastor, teacher, or staff minister. For me, it came after an encouraging word from a pastor teaching my Old Testament survey class in high school. It came from the persistence of an MLC admissions counselor who took the time to get to know me and my story. I didn't come from a ministry family, so this pull I felt towards the pulpit was not something I had ever planned on.

It was an unexpected call . . . an emergency call this time.

Over six years since I first considered ministry—after five years of studying Greek, Hebrew, and theology with the men that had gone from being classmates to my best friends—I had a call: to serve for one year as admissions director at Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), one of our synod's ministerial education high schools. The same God who had guided my steps to serve him was paving a new way to do just that at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. I was given a few days to think things over, but it wasn't long before I realized that this was no diversion from the pre-determined path, but the next step in the plan God had for me all along.

It can be an unexpected call . . . my recruitment efforts take all different shapes and sizes.

Sometimes it's an eager invitation to come watch the MLS basketball team play, my arm around Conrad the Cardinal, our mascot. Sometimes it's a meeting with a concerned mother who asks me to explain how she could possibly send her son across the country to live in our dorms. Sometimes it's answering all the

questions a room of eighth graders can come up with or explaining to a kindergarten class that a "cemetery" is a very different thing than a "seminary." But it's always ministry.

I've gotten to try so many new things this year. I've had opportunities I never would have imagined, and I've had to learn my way through challenges I didn't know I'd have to navigate. But I've realized that no matter what the calling looks like on a given day,



it's ministry. Whether I'm lobbing a free t-shirt to a kid at a grade school or sitting across from a high school senior about to make what she sees as the biggest decision of her young life, I've got an open door to tell them how God has opened doors in all the most unexpected places. I get to tell them how he's shown me again and again that even when I think I've got my path figured out, he's got a better way. I get to tell them that their name is written in the Book of Life too, and that God will use them and their gifts in incredible ways for his kingdom—ways we can't begin to imagine in the here and now. I get to tell them that their voice matters—to encourage them to use it to sing God's praises and speak his message of reconciliation to the world.

I didn't expect to discover that our best recruiters aren't recruiters at all . . .

There's a special place for people with a job like mine. It's good to have people whose job it is to go to a school and do this work every day. But something is lost when I walk into the room wearing a big ol' cardinal logo on my shirt to tell people to consider ministry. I take the risk of being perceived as some kind of traveling salesman, a purveyor of free merch for the sake of building the "business" of our school. That's an obstacle I've had to learn how to get around, but it's also a blessing I like to share with people everywhere I go.

*You are a far better recruiter than I am. You have these young people in your life—kids that call you grandma or dad or their teacher or their mentor. If I came to town, they probably wouldn't even know what to call me (as tends to be the problem for a man stuck between junior and middler year at the seminary). But they know you. Your words are as good as gold.*

It might be an unexpected call . . . they might not see in themselves what you can see. But you get to make sure they know you see it. It might be an unexpected call . . . they may have never pictured themselves serving in the ministry before. But you can make sure that's never true again.

God doesn't always work in the ways we expect, but we can expect him to work. He is faithful, and his Word moves powerfully through the ministry efforts of his chosen messengers. May we all learn to look to him to tell us where he might use us next! †

*After completing one year at the seminary, Cameron Schroeder received a limited-duration call (in many cases referred to as an "emergency call") to serve for one year at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Michigan. Cam returned to the seminary to continue his training in the 2024-2025 school year.*





Students work together to beautify the seminary campus on Arbor Day



Pastors and students attend the annual Fall Symposium



The Seminary Chorus sings while visitors learn about the mission of WLS on Friends of the Seminary Day



A hawk perches atop the Luther statue on campus



A student learns about WELS Military Services during Mission and Ministry



All ages participate in the annual Seminary Scurry fun run





Professor Headrick and his family on the day of his installation



The Seminary Chorus performs their Christmas concert to a packed auditorium



Professors Paul Waldschmidt, Rob Wendland, Steve Pagels, and Jon Micheel celebrate 25 years in the public ministry



WELS pastors share a light moment at the WLS Alumni meeting



Excitement fills the air as students receive calls to serve as vicars



2024 WLS graduates pose with the next generation, born during their dads' time at the seminary



# A Different Path

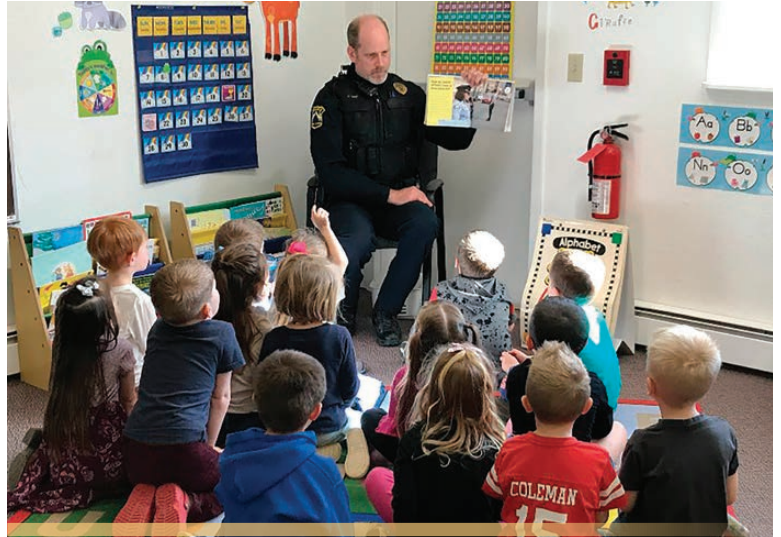
If you were to survey Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students as to the route they took to the seminary, most would have similar, traditional paths. However, a few, including me, took a different path. God made each of us unique, and we all have different backgrounds. It is our individual experiences that shape us and make us who we are. It is my privilege to share the path God has led me along in pursuing a career change into public ministry.

With a passion for the outdoors, my initial aim after college was to become a conservation officer. However, a different opportunity presented itself, and I was hired by a sheriff's office in Minnesota as a patrol deputy. Six years later I was promoted to an investigator. For the next fifteen years, I worked general investigations ranging from property crimes to death investigations and everything in between. During that time, God had blessed me with a wife and six children. At this point in my career, an opportunity for work arose in Alaska. My wife and I struggled with the decision. After many prayers, I applied and was hired, and our family of eight moved to Alaska where I served as a police officer.

It was in my mid-forties when the demands the job placed on my body began to tell me, "Enough is enough." Law enforcement is primarily a young man's occupation. As a result, many of my older co-workers would look for something that they could transition into later in their career. I had been active in congregations we were members of, even having been asked if I had ever considered public ministry. "No," I replied, "that is not for me." Little did I know God had something different in mind for me.

It was in Alaska that, with the help of my pastor, I took the first step towards a career change. One of the biggest decisions of my life was to resign from full-time employment (with insurance benefits) and move our family to New Ulm to enroll in MLC's Seminary Certification Program. I was the sole bread winner for our family, I was leaving the known for the unknown. There was no turning back. My decision to leave a good-paying career to return to school to become a pastor was something many of my co-workers did not understand. Still, something had convinced me during all those years. God had given me a front-row seat to witness how utterly corrupt the sinful nature was and how desperately people need to hear his gospel message.

Looking back on this journey, it has been truly humbling and incredible to see how God has blessed us—more than we could ever have imagined! Feelings of fear and doubt



have been replaced by trust and assurance, knowing that God is with us wherever we go. It is incredible to see how supportive people have been to my family and me during this process. As I reflect, I have much to be thankful for. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Still, who am I to be doing this work? I do not have any relatives who are called workers. How could I be considered to share God's Word with others? Little did I know my work and life experiences would shape and prepare me for this journey. Along the way, God showed me things that most people would never care to see. Those experiences left their imprint on me, convincing me of the urgent need to share Jesus. Through law enforcement, God gave me an appreciation for how fragile life truly is; no one is promised tomorrow. We do not need to travel overseas to a foreign country to find a mission field. Through my work I saw firsthand how few people believe and how desperate the need is for witnessing in our communities.

I am thankful that God has been with me all the time along the journey. I joke with people who know what I did in my prior career, saying, "For the first half of my life I dished out the law, and God-willing, for the second half I'll dish out the gospel." Both law enforcement and the pastoral ministry serve people, but in different ways. Instead of protecting people physically, a pastor is protecting them spiritually. With our synod's current shortage of pastors, it is my prayer more may consider the calling to serve in public ministry. †

*Chris Gorr served as vicar at David's Star Lutheran Church in Jackson, Wisconsin, during the 2023–2024 school year.*

# "A Small Thing" Shows Generous Hearts

"It's a small thing I can do." This is how Ralph Schwark, a retired WELS member living in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, describes the Schwark Family Fund. This fund supports the work of the library of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Well, the fund might have started small, but it's not small anymore.

Many years ago, after Ralph's father was called home to heaven, his mother was deciding what to do with gifts of money given in her husband's memory. She decided to combine these memorial gifts into a trust fund. The fund, she decided, would be used to help the seminary library.



Why the seminary library? Ralph's brother had studied at the seminary. The Schwark family was grateful for the training he and other pastors received there, and they knew that the library played a vital role in that training. His brother had once taken Ralph on a tour of the seminary, and the library had piqued his interest. The rows of books reminded Ralph of his own fondness for reading, and so, when the opportunity for giving a special gift arose, the seminary library was a natural choice to receive it.

When Ralph's mother died, he had the responsibility to handle gifts given in her honor. He used them to rejuvenate the Schwark Family Fund.

During the following years, a little at a time, contributions were made, and the fund grew steadily. Ralph again added to it after the loss of his wife. This time it was not only memorial gifts but also a part of his wife's estate that he contributed to it. And when one of Ralph's sons went to be with the Lord, the fund grew again when a portion of his estate was directed there.

Something that started small, a fund begun with small gifts in sympathy cards, is not so small anymore.

The Schwark family has long supported the public ministry and encouraged people to study with the aim of serving one day. This steady encouragement has borne fruit. Ralph has had two sons who became pastors, and he has a granddaughter who is a teacher in a Lutheran school. The family fund, then, is one of several ways that this family expresses their love for the Lord and supports his work. †

*Jonathan Micheel teaches courses in preaching and church history at the seminary.*

## Recent Blessings to the Seminary Library

In 2023, the WLS library fully implemented technology that allows users to access online library resources from anywhere in the world. This access is especially useful for married seminary students who live off-campus and for pastors who are taking classes online or at a satellite location.

Recently the seminary began subscribing to a database called AtlaSerials Plus for Alumni. This database provides access to theological journal articles from over 600 publications. This service has been available to seminary students for many years, but the library is now able to offer access to more journals and offer access to all seminary alumni.

Through generous gifts from donors, the library has recently improved its ability to digitize books, articles, old 35mm slides, and historical documents. These tools will make it possible for important material, which otherwise would be very difficult to find, much more accessible for students and those doing historical research. †





# Serving Our Community

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary offers a wide range of opportunities for its students to apply their ministry skills in real-life situations. During their early field training (EFT), each student gets to preach and preside at their assigned congregation. Students have opportunities to attend multicultural events and canvass nearby neighborhoods as part of their evangelism classes. Many students also have the chance to get valuable preaching experiences at churches in or around their hometowns, where they share the sermons they have written over the course of their junior year. During their vicar year, students have the option to travel to different parts of the country to gain more practical experience in canvassing, presenting, and problem-solving.

While the seminary gives a variety of experiences to students to improve their ministry skills, sometimes students are presented with opportunities to shine their lights in the community. Twice a year, the seminary partners with the American Red Cross to provide life-saving blood donations on our campus. Students willingly volunteer time away from classes to help organize volunteers, hang posters in local coffee shops promoting the drive, donate blood, and ensure that everything at the drive runs smoothly.

Partnering with non-profits, like the American Red Cross, shows that we are serious about being citizens of both kingdoms. Not only does the seminary care about the spiritual health of our community and world by instructing students in the care for souls, but we also care deeply about the physical health of those around us. Since our heavenly Father has blessed us in so many ways, we are excited to give back to others through our time and blood donations.



A single pint of blood can save up to three lives. Selfless love like that has a profound impact on the one donating and the one receiving the donation.

Another benefit of serving with a non-profit is that seminary students get to rub shoulders with people in our community who otherwise would never set foot on the seminary's campus. Many of the nurses and community volunteers will tell you that the purpose of life is to leave the world a better place than we found it. At a drive like this, we have the opportunity to share what drives our purpose. We love, we serve, we volunteer, and we donate because we have a Savior who was willing to shed his own blood to give us true life found in the forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with God. A new life that will also be an eternal life with him forever in heaven.

The 2023 fall blood drive was a great success. Though I wish I could tell you I had an engaging, heartwarming, or deep conversation about faith with one of the nurses or the members of our community who took the time to donate on our campus, that would not be true. But maybe that is not the point of a drive like this.

Though it might not look flashy or glamorous, the students pinning a poster to a bulletin board, the students sitting at the check-in desk or reclining in the donation chair, and the students sweeping the gymnasium after another successful drive, have the opportunity to represent their Savior in a unique way. Though we may not always have the opportunity to share the words of the gospel directly, we are showing that Jesus' command to love neighbor above self is vitally important to us. †

*Duane "Duke" Backus is a 2024 graduate of the seminary.*



# Mission and Ministry 2024

“Do you think you could do that?” From kindergarten on we are asked some flavor of that question. “Do you think you could be a doctor? An astronaut? How about President?” As students preparing for the noble task of serving as under-shepherds for the Chief Shepherd, often we face the question, “Do you think you could do that? Do you think you could do mission work?”

That’s where Mission and Ministry comes in. Every year in early February, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary pauses its typical class schedule for three days. During those days we hear and learn about the incredible ways that God has blessed the mission work happening at home and abroad and the different ways our synod supports those missionaries. An energizing buzz bounces off students as we break out into workshops, listen to keynotes, and tune in to the varied opportunities for gospel ministry throughout the WELS. In 2024, twenty-four presenters and twenty-seven organizations descended onto campus to share their experiences with men eager to get into parish life. Mission and Ministry serves an important role in forming future pastors and missionaries by exposing them to firsthand ministry experiences and valuable resources.

Over these three days, students connect with brothers and sisters around the world. It is one thing to know that we are united by our faith in Christ, but it is a completely other thing to sit at the feet and learn from the experience of others who are currently serving in congregations and mission fields. The men and women who come to this event connect us to people and ministries we may never have a chance to be a part of. Presenters, who were in our shoes only a few years ago, share their experiences as missionaries or first-year church planters. World missionaries come

and tell students what they wish they had known before they were sent out to their new homes. How to serve in a mental health epidemic, how to make membership meaningful, how to best serve and proclaim the gospel to the people in our area—all these are examples of questions we consider at Mission and Ministry.

But our connections don’t stop there. Throughout Mission and Ministry, we also connect with other pastoral students. Martin Luther College juniors studying in the pastor track are invited to take in a day of classes, attend the first day of the event, and bond with brothers on a similar path. Our ELS brothers from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (BLTS) take in two days of the event to learn and sharpen the tools in their toolkit, too. This past year, BLTS students even stayed an extra day after Mission and Ministry concluded. They sat in on our classes and deepened our discussions.

Who sets all this up? Students do. Men from each class are elected to serve on the Mission and Ministry Committee to plan and coordinate the event. They consult students about the things they want to know before they are out on their own. The committee then meets with synod liaisons to find the best person to speak to those needs. Workshops are created, presenters are contacted, plans are finalized, and months of planning pay off. For the men blessed to serve in these roles, they gain valuable experience in administration, clear communication skills, and managing the other ins and outs that invariably pop up while planning a three-day event for 200 people. As the man blessed to serve as chairman for the

2024 event, I learned to lead a team of eight mission-conscious men and utilize their God-given abilities.

It’s only natural after an event like this to wonder to yourself that same question we are asked from kindergarten on: “Can I do something like this?” Maybe that’s the wrong question. Instead, we should ask, “Can God do something like this through me?” If we are to do it, God will have to be the one to get it done. We are



not competent on our own to do this work. The first-year church planter still confesses that he’s learning as he goes. The world missionary with decades of experience can tell us what it takes to serve around the globe but joyfully confesses that God is the one who makes it grow.

For three days every February, we get to see our future: service in the Lord’s name, wherever that takes us. What a humbling and invigorating thing. I’m completely biased when I say that it is my favorite three days of the year. But I’m sure I’m not alone. It’s motivating to know that there are brothers and sisters in the faith emboldened by the promise that God will be with them wherever they go. We hear their stories, their encouragements and echo their resilient cry: with God’s word and his promises at our side, we will go, wherever God would want us. †

*Ben Bitter is a 2024 graduate of the seminary.*



# Strange Place Serves a Strange God

You are going to our seminary for a visit, and before you get there you start to formulate what you'll experience. When you step onto the campus you are struck by its beauty and nostalgia. And it's not a fleeting impression. Some of the possible preconceived notions deepen. What catches your eye piques your curiosity. The main buildings are fort-like. The arched entrance gives further evidence of an aged stronghold. Seeing the faculty and students dressed in their "Sunday best" instills seriousness and almost solemnity. Inside the building photos of past graduating classes and their professors line the hallway and classroom walls. And then you hear of a spiral staircase leading to a place called the "Holy Ghost Room." What kind of hallowed ground are we standing on?

For those unfamiliar with the seminary, it is a striking place. For those unfamiliar with their Savior, the seminary is a strange place. Why are these young men dedicating their lives to this work, why are they dressed so formally, why are they studying such strange and ancient languages (Hebrew and Greek, sometimes Latin or German), why are they rapping their knuckles on wood? [Rapping on desks is a traditional way of applauding in German universities. -ed.] Why are the professors so adamant about being faithful to the Word and studying it in its original text, why are those professors and the administration so intent on trusting the Holy Spirit to do his work through the power of the gospel? It is an odd thing, but it is good.

Not only is it good, but it comes from God, and he is a strange God, who is described as doing "strange work"—calling sinners to repentance (Isaiah 28:21). God is not strange as if to imply that he does illogical things



or follows some whimsical ideas. But rather, a world that does not know him or his truth and grace, finds him odd. And so the seminary follows suit. It is established and operates in a way that much of the world shakes its head or smiles condescendingly at, questioning its efforts and commitment. Our seminary is a strange place, but it is good.

Our seminary has wonderful grounds and buildings, capable and trustworthy administrators, intellectually gifted and faithful faculty, endearing traditions, committed and enthusiastic students, and a staff with a servant's heart. These things are good and should cause us to rejoice. But before you accuse this author of indulgent flattery of those who serve at the seminary, all of those who serve there know and admit that they are flawed and on their own incapable of carrying out the seminary's mission. *They are not what really makes our seminary good.* What makes it good is God's hand that guides and directs our seminary. It is God who gives the seminary its purpose, and it is God blessing the efforts of those who serve there. What is strange to the world is just that—an unexplainable, wonderful grace. God has put this work in the hands of faulty humans so that his power may be known and his name be adored.

The seminary has a governing board made up of pastors, laymen, a teacher,

and advisory members. We get to see some of the nuts and bolts of how this institution operates. When the board members come to the seminary campus we get to sit in classes and hear the depth of knowledge of God's word the students and professors strive for. We worship in chapel with the students, faculty, and staff; listening to God's grace by a student or professor and joining together in praise. We informally gather with students and professors and are greeted with gratitude and genuineness. At times the board is part of the calling of new professors. What a humbling experience. Faculty are chosen for their intellectual capacity, but also for their understanding and experience of serving as shepherds in a congregation. If the focus and mission of the seminary is to prepare pastors to serve in congregations, they must learn from those who have a love for God's people and understanding of how to serve them while proclaiming the truths of his will. In each and every duty that the board is tasked with, there must be an intentional purpose: to see how finances, calling faculty members, evaluating capital endeavors, or getting to know the seminary family are all intimately connected to the seminary's purpose and work—preparing pastors to serve our Lord and his people with the power of the gospel.

A visit to the seminary is a wonderful experience. Thankfully, it is also a "strange" experience in the best possible way. Strange in that it holds firmly to and readily proclaims the truth of God's word in a world that has frequently given it up. Join me in praying that such important work continues for ages to come. †

*Phil Stern teaches at Fox Valley Lutheran High School and serves as member of the seminary's governing board.*

# The Blessings of Being a Vicar near Washington, DC

There are a lot of cool things about being a vicar at Grace Lutheran Church in Falls Church, Virginia, a church located about nine miles away from the United States Capitol. Being that close, many of the people I have met there are either government or military personnel. I know one of the president's chefs, who told me that President Biden's favorite meal is a burger and shake.

Besides government and military, I have also met people from a wide range of countries. There are over 170 different nationalities and ethnic groups living in the DC area. Because of the unique background and diversity of the people here, I am blessed to know people with incredibly interesting perspectives and experiences.

Andy and Susan are two of those people whose stories I have had the privilege of hearing. Andy and Susan met in Warsaw, Poland, while they were both working as diplomats for the US government.

Yet it was not while working at their jobs that Andy and Susan got to know each other. Rather, it was in a tiny international church where they started a conversation and realized that they both shared a common faith. Soon after, they got married and continued in their Christian and governmental roles around the world, living in a variety of places (Lithuania, Israel, Czech Republic, Malaysia, Japan, Iraq, and Washington, DC). Their two children, Evan and Kate, were confirmed here at Grace during their time in the DC area.

I had the chance to sit down with Andy, and he shared a few observations from his time abroad.

First of all, as a US government employee, Andy and Susan were not allowed to attempt to convert others. They could not openly and freely talk about their faith or give out biblical literature. Not only that, but they could even be arrested in some countries if they did.



While this made it harder to talk about their faith, being a government worker offered them plenty of opportunities to *live* their faith. Instead of becoming arrogant while holding a high government position, Andy and Susan found that by listening to input from others, by treating others how they themselves would want to be treated, and by genuinely trying to serve others, they could live out their Christian faith and values. By doing that, people would notice, and sometimes religion would come up naturally in the conversation. Although it would not be wise for them to have a long conversation at work, they could meet up for a cup of coffee and talk as private people instead of as government employees.

Andy also shared much about the different worship practices in each place they lived. Though the places and forms of worship varied greatly, the doctrine remained solidly grounded in God's Word.

During his thirty years or so living as a Christian in the secular world, Andy found there were always ways he could live out his faith while serving his country without one contradicting the other.

On Easter Sunday, in 2017, Andy led an Easter worship service in Baghdad, Iraq. Meanwhile, a man named Rick also led an Easter worship service in Saudi Arabia. On the same day, Easter worship services were being held here at Grace, the same congregation both these men belonged to. So, from a small church here in Falls Church, people were celebrating the resurrection of their Savior across the world, in the most unlikely of places. And I was blessed to be a vicar at that same church. †

*Vicar year is the third year of seminary training and takes place in a congregational setting. Chris Walther was a vicar at Grace Lutheran, Falls Church, Virginia, during the 2023–2024 school year.*



# Master of Theology

Like many words, the word theology can point to a variety of things. Sometimes theology is pointing to all Christian teaching and sometimes more narrowly to the teachings about God's nature, characteristics, and actions. God's word is inexhaustible; he and his ways beyond what we can grasp. The study of theology is not easy; this side of eternity no one can master it.

When we say that the men at our seminary are studying *theology*, however, we have more than teachings



in mind. Our seminary students are learning how to be ministers (servants) of God's word among real people, how to be captains in a long-fought war, how to be leaders in a spiritual kingdom. That kind of theology is never easy; this side of eternity no one can master it.

Theology is not easy because the ministers of the word and those being served with the word have a sinful nature that likes to show up and ruin things. Theology is not easy because the war is spiritual, not against flesh and blood but against the forces of Satan. Theology is not easy because Christ's kingdom is so unlike the kingdoms of this world. It is not of the world, and the world hates it. From a human perspective, the ways of Christ and his kingdom are foolish, pitiful, and hopeless. In reality, Christ and his kingdom are wise, glorious, and eternal. The

citizens of Christ's kingdom know this by faith; this side of eternity no one can know it by sight.

Be amazed with me that anyone would set their heart on being a pastor—a theologian, a servant, a captain, a leader in Christ's kingdom. Be amazed with me that so many of them keep on keeping on. Jesus supplies them. Jesus sustains them.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary prepares men to serve as faithful theologians. Once they have become pastors, the seminary partners with them for their own spiritual and professional growth. Spiritual growth enables them to keep praying, meditating on God's word, and fighting the fight of faith. Professional growth enables them to carry out the duties of gospel ministry with wisdom, skill, and precision. The kingdom and the enemy of the kingdom do not change, but the landscape and the enemy's tactics do. Combatants are always learning. They must, for their life depends on it. As they contend in this spiritual battle, the captains in Christ's kingdom are always seeking to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"

(2 Peter 3:18), to feed his sheep and lambs (John 21:15–17), and to watch over people's souls "as men who must give an account" (Hebrews 13:17).

Through the efforts of Grow in Grace, the seminary supports and encourages pastors in a variety of ways, one of which is formal continuing education. Every year Grow in Grace provides dozens of face-to-face and online courses. If pastors are so inclined, they can complete enough courses to earn another degree called the Master of Sacred Theology (STM).

Truth be told, our pastors never master sacred theology. They remain apprentices under the Holy Spirit. The more they learn, the more they know they don't know.

The real "Master of Sacred Theology" is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has crushed the enemy and established a kingdom of grace that will never end. When pastors join with other pastors to study God's word and discuss theology, the risen and ascended Savior is with them to equip them, encourage them, and make them a blessing to the other citizens of his kingdom. †

*Bradley Wordell is director of Grow in Grace, the seminary's continuing education department. He also teaches courses in Old Testament.*

# Recruiting for Future Harvest

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:11,12). How does Christ go about giving these gifts of called workers to his church? In the WELS, we have the privilege of hearing call acceptance letters and witnessing call days—evidence of the love the Lord of the harvest shows for us, his church. Yet the way that God chooses to lead each individual called worker to consider, pursue, and enter gospel ministry is a bit of a mystery to us. We know that the Holy Spirit is constantly working on the hearts of believers through Word and Sacrament. Through this gospel the Holy Spirit encourages, strengthens, and leads people into lives of service. God works through various gospel proclaimers to encourage young believers along the way to future gospel ministry.

This past school year I was privileged to serve as one of those encouragers. I served as Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s student recruiter. This job was created just under a decade ago to support the ministerial recruitment of the WELS and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. So, what does the WLS student recruiter do? I suppose you could say that what he does is what I described above. The recruiter simply encourages young believers to consider serving Jesus in the public ministry of the gospel. However, there are multiple ways that the student recruiter goes about carrying out that task. These include grade school presentations, leading tours of our campus, and hosting events at the seminary.

Perhaps the biggest job of the WLS student recruiter is presenting at WELS grade schools. When I first began my work as the student recruiter, I remember thinking to myself, “How does someone recruit grade-schoolers to consider attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the distant future?” Even if the young men to whom I would speak to wanted to become WELS pastors, most of them would not be attending the seminary for over a decade. As I thought about the answer to that question, I realized what the main thrust of these presentations would be. I had the opportunity to go out and preach the gospel to young hearts! Now, my

presentations certainly contained information, pictures, and encouragement to attend both Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Yet primarily I told those grade schoolers about the Savior who loved them and died for them. Young students who are firmly rooted in their Savior may grow into older students who desire to share that same faith in the public ministry.

Another large part of the WLS student recruiter’s job is being the head tour guide on campus. Each year dozens of grade schools, congregations, and families come and visit the seminary. We have the privilege of showing them around our beautiful campus as we describe to them the work the Lord has set before us as seminary students and professors. We always make a point to explain that our seminary is their seminary. For each guest who visits, our seminary has likely had a great impact on their lives as the pastors who have served them, are serving them, and will serve them are equipped, strengthened, and trained on our campus.

The student recruiter is also tasked with planning various events such as the annual Seminary Scurry 5K and Kids Run, Focus on the Ministry events on campus for high schoolers who are considering studying for the pastoral ministry, a special grade school chapel day at the seminary, and more. While there were many unique tasks that I carried out over my year as the WLS student recruiter, I thank God most of all for the opportunity to do what we all love to do—to tell the story of Jesus’ love for us and for the world. †

*Clayton “C.J.” Fury is a 2024 graduate of the seminary.*





# Partnering with Dual Citizens to Proclaim the Gospel Globally

1880–1920 marked the heyday of foreign mission interest and activity among American Protestants. At the center of this crusade, one mission society alone sent 20,000 missionaries abroad between 1880 and 1950. The 1904 edition of *The Encyclopedia of Missions* states that there were 13,371 Christian missionaries worldwide; 2,708 were in China.

In 1905 my great-grandfather was sent as the first Augustana Swedish Synod missionary to China. He was one of those multitudes sent out with the gospel to lands that were not Christianized. This was a missionary era when men and women said goodbye to their extended families and set off for far away and exotic, and sometimes dangerous, lands in order to carry out our Lord's Great Commission.

Times have changed. We aren't sending out as many missionaries into world mission fields as we once did. However, world mission work is not decreasing. It's actually increasing as we employ new strategies. The Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary plays a vital role in this global gospel outreach.

## CHANGING MISSION STRATEGIES

In 1980, WELS had about 80 missionaries worldwide. By 2000, we had 63 missionaries worldwide. In 2010, the number had decreased to 34. Today we have 46 missionaries (a slight increase) in 19 countries, and yet we have mission partners in 45 countries. What changed? What is going on here? Did financial constraints cause the missionary reductions in the early 2000s? Partly. There is a reason why our worldwide missionary force has stayed relatively small, even though our synod still has a relatively large mission footprint worldwide. The reason is that we've changed the way we carry out our Lord's Great Commission. Rather than trying to teach our Anglo missionaries another language, which can take years, we are more intentional about training leaders from within the various people groups with whom we are working. These leaders, working in their native language, then partner with us to spread the gospel. We still send missionaries abroad to carry out our Lord's Great Commission, but in many ways the world is now coming to us as diverse people groups move into our communities and neighborhoods.

PSI is currently training 32 students from 11 different



people groups in 21 locations throughout North America. The Joshua Urban Ministry Program (JUMP) is a PSI initiative that currently trains seven men who grew up in urban environments to minister in urban environments. Five Chinese men spent one week at the seminary for intensive study in January 2024. Three more Chinese men are instructed via Zoom by one of our Chinese instructors. Three men from Calgary, Alberta, from three different people groups, have been accepted into the PSI program. The world has and continues to come to North America.

PSI's charter is to "walk with kingdom-committed spiritual leaders worldwide," working with them and nurturing them as they and their groups join and continue in the fellowship of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). The term "walk with" is used deliberately; the PSI values an ongoing mutual relationship. This relationship continues beyond the completion of a program, especially as leaders develop their own training programs for their own people in their countries of origin.

## WORKING WITH DUAL CITIZENS

PSI's privilege is to work with men who are literally dual citizens. We are responsible for the theological training of non-traditional, non-Anglo men to serve as pastors to their people group. They are almost always immigrants to the US and Canada and are bilingual, so teaching and communi-



cating with them in English is generally not an obstacle. In turn then, the student can easily communicate the truths of the gospel with his own community in their native language. In more ways than we can often understand, a PSI student is a dual citizen, a citizen of two worlds.

Once a strong theological foundation has been laid with the local flock (assisted by WELS Home Missions), we look for ways to help the PSI graduate reach back to his home country (assisted by WELS World Missions). The goal is to establish an outpost for the gospel there in the target community's first language. This partnership between Home and World Missions is the focus of the work of the Joint Mission Council (JMC). PSI is responsible for training the local North American based leader, and then we assist in reaching out to the leader's community in his home country. One way of thinking about it might be to say that the JMC and PSI are constantly working in a world of people with dual citizenship.

One example of the support that our church body places behind our PSI students is the ministry of David Shang. Since David started his PSI studies in February of 2021, through his online lectures he has made contact with, and arranged for the baptisms of, 78 souls worldwide. Pastor Neil Birkholz, our WELS North American Asian Ministry Coordinator, offers David valuable guidance as he continues reaching and building up souls.

Another of our students, Mark Jiang, came to the United States in the fall of 2019. His intent was to complete a couple more years of law school. He met a man that encouraged him to attend seminary, but before enrolling he met one of our WELS pastors, who encouraged Mark to consider our Pastoral Studies Institute as his seminary option. Today, Mark is on-track to graduate the PSI program in May 2025. Mark serves his local congregation and a group of 20–35 Chinese speakers about 8 hours north, while also providing commentaries and devotions online for use by a wider Mandarin speaking audience.

Still another example is Daniel, a university student in Maine studying computer science. A career in computer science, however, is only his plan “B.” His goal is to prepare himself to serve as a pastor in our church body. Along with his full load of university responsibilities, he studies every week with two other PSI students online with one of our Chinese PSI instructors.

What all of these PSI students have in common, along with all of our traditional seminary students, is that they are preparing themselves to proclaim a gospel of rich and overflowing forgiveness in Jesus. This gospel guarantees them, and their hearers, that disciples of Jesus are truly dual citizens; we serve God and man here, while our true home is in heaven. What nobler work could a person be entrusted with? †

*Harland “Skip” Goetzinger serves as director of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI).*







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