



Good News-Letter

St. Michael's Ev. Lutheran Church

May 2025

A Member of the WELS

I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will give it to me on that day, and not only to me but also to everyone who loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7b-8)

This month many young people are graduating. These are times for celebration. They have come to a milestone in their education. They've put in the time and effort and can now feel satisfaction. Whether it's from high school or college, they feel a sense of achievement. Maybe it's a son or daughter graduation. Parents swell with pride thinking about how well their child did.

The apostle Paul, who wrote the verse quoted above, was also about to graduate, but not from high school or college. He knew that his life on this earth was almost done. So he was ready to go to the next level. He was ready to go to heaven.

Think of some of the beautiful pictures God's Word has for us. A runner is running a race. It's not a sprint but it is long distance like a marathon. The runner gets a prize for just finishing the race. They feel exhausted, yet happy. That's how Paul felt. His life was like a long race that was almost done. Now he was looking forward to going to heaven.

We can't say that we're going to heaven because we have worked hard, can we? We didn't run a perfect race. Often, we stumbled. We fell down. We lost our way. So many hurdles. So many failures. But we're reaching the finish line because our Savior ran a perfect race for us. His was not an easy race either. Along the way Satan was shooting flaming arrows of temptation at him. He suffered through them all. But he maintained the course. And the last stretch was the hardest. He'd have to bear the sins of all humanity and suffer God's punishment for them all. From a cross he'd breathe his very last breathe, but not before exclaiming: "IT IS FINISHED!" When the dust had settled, he came out victorious. Even the grave could not hold him. He won the victory for every soul. And that's why Paul could look forward to heaven.

We can't say we're going to heaven because we worked

so hard. We don't work hard and then make it. Rather, it is God who does the work and gives us all the benefits.

Think of a courtroom. Satan is like a prosecutor, pointing out why the judge should punish us. And we can't argue against it. The evidence is clear: All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. God should punish us. But he's already done that when he put his Son through hell's punishment on a cross. So which punishment would you prefer? Your own or Jesus'? For Jesus' sake God now declares us "not guilty!" As a result, heaven is now open for us. Everything is ready for us to graduate from life on this earth.

What a graduation it will be! There won't be anything bad in heaven—no hunger, no thirst, no sadness or loss. No sin will be there. We will be able to talk to God face to face just as we talk to friends.

Sometimes people discover that the degree they received upon graduating doesn't mean very much. They find themselves deep in debt without many jobs available. Perhaps the person finds out they don't like the kind of work they have to do. Who wouldn't be disappointed?

When God graduates us, however, we surely won't be sad because we will be enjoying great and unending happiness. In confident faith we look forward to graduating and joining God in heaven! While we wait, we thank our Lord for the many blessings he gives us on this earth. He helps us look forward to graduating and joining him in heaven.

This May we recognize several young people who will graduate including the following members of St. Michael's: Grayden Barum & Ariana Suhr from CFC, Kyler Ernst from UWSP, and Chance Ernst from SE Mn Tech. On Sunday, May 18 we will recognize our graduates and include a special prayer for them in our 9:30am worship service. Please encourage all of our young people involved in education to use their God-given talents for learning.

We also remember our recent graduates of life who are with our Lord in paradise: Ron Engstrand on Feb. 2, Everall Veraguth on Feb. 9, and Hellen Ellefson on Feb. 12. God keep us all faithful as we strive for graduation.

Conference of Presidents holds April 2025 meeting

The WELS Conference of Presidents (COP) held its spring meeting this month at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis. The COP comprises the 12 WELS district presidents, the synod president, and two synod vice presidents. Here is a summary of what they discussed.

- The COP continues to develop sample governance models for congregations developing congregational constitutions and bylaws.
- The COP reviewed the procedures it will follow as it carries out teaching assignments at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., in May, including clarifying that preseminary graduates (who do not continue at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary) are not automatically certified for non-pastoral ministry. Those called to other types of service (such as teaching) will normally need to enroll in the synod's teacher certification program.
- The COP continues to review the calling process, especially in view of the challenges of pastor and teacher shortages.
- The Assignment Committee will continue to consider emergency teaching calls after the assignments are made in May.
- The COP was asked to reconsider a proposal to change the synod convention from a biennial to a triennial schedule. The 12 districts heard this proposal last summer, and the majority of districts were not in favor of the change. In view of that, the COP declined to reconsider the proposal at this time, but it did decide that additional rationale could be placed before the district conventions in 2026.
- The COP reviewed the new long-range strategic plan that will be presented to the synod convention in July.
- As of the April meeting of the COP, there were 156 pastoral vacancies in the synod, with 149 of those being parish pastor positions. The 2025 seminary graduating class will provide candidates numbering in the mid-20s, meaning that the pastoral vacancy situation will improve only slightly in the near term. Larger classes at the seminary in the coming years, however, will provide some relief in the future. In the meantime, the COP asks every WELS congregation and member to encourage young men to consider training for the pastoral ministry.
- A similar high vacancy rate is taking place in teacher positions. WELS school enrollments have increased

significantly in the last two years—a real blessing—but that has caused a need for more teachers than are currently available. It's estimated that even after teacher candidates are assigned at Martin Luther College in May, there will still be approximately 100-120 vacancies in teaching positions. The Commission on Lutheran Schools has been working with congregations to find ways to fill the vacancies. At the same time, Martin Luther College has been redoubling its efforts to recruit both traditional and non-traditional teacher candidates. It will also be exploring other ideas to provide more teacher candidates. As in the case of pastors, those in the best position to recruit and encourage young people for the teaching ministry are congregational members, called workers, parents, and grandparents.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder

A partnership for the gospel

When I was a girl, I remember learning about church fellowship. It was always something negative. "Don't commune with them," or "I can't worship with her." Now, on the Europe Team, I am blessed to see the positive, warm, happy side of church fellowship. And I see it every day! The Europe Team partners with about a dozen sister churches—churches with whom we share fellowship. What does that actually mean? Does it mean that when I visit Berlin, or Tirana, or Stockholm, there is a worship service that I can gladly join? Yes, absolutely, and much, much more!

In Philippians 1:4,5, St. Paul gives thanks for believers with whom he shares a "partnership in the gospel." Fellowship means working together to proclaim Jesus' good news. None of our churches is large, or has all the ideas, or has all the gifts. Fellowship means partnering to share experiences, ideas, resources, and gifts.

Let me give you a concrete example.

Meet Benni. Benjamin (Benni) Hugk is a seminary student from the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church—Germany (ELFK), our sister church in Germany. For a while, Benni was the only student in the ELFK seminary. Benni loves people, so studying alone was not so easy. Benni applied to study for a year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wis. He wanted to meet and study with many brothers as well as have the opportunity to get to know WELS better.

Benni arrived in Mequon in August 2024, eager to make the most of his year in the United States.

Benni's love for people goes hand-in-hand with his special gift for evangelism. He finds it easy to talk with people and naturally directs their conversation to Christ.

Benni set the goal for himself to develop his evangelism skills even more at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Here are a few examples:

- He's taking as many evangelism courses as possible. For one course, he and a partner set up a donut stand at Marquette University in Milwaukee. The price of a donut? Asking Benni a spiritual question and discussing it.
- During Winterim, he joined Prof. Allen Sorum on an evangelism trip to Houston for canvassing and a food drive. There he learned to "be comfortable with the uncomfortable."
- At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Mission and Ministry event in February, he listened to presentations about encouraging and motivating others in our congregations to do personal evangelism. He loved the mission mindset throughout the event: "I want to keep that mindset and bring it home to Germany."

Benni appreciates that Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary holds the students to high standards but also provides great support. "The professors are real people who care about the students and understand struggles. They provide support and encouragement so that no one falls through the cracks."

When I spoke with Benni, he had just returned from a ten-day tour singing with the Seminary Chorus at churches in Wisconsin, Nebraska, Colorado, South Dakota, and Minnesota. The first concert of the tour at St. John's on the Hillside in Milwaukee drew more than 1,100 listeners! Almost every night, the choir stayed with host families. "I got to know very different families and how they live, their view on church and things in the world. It's nice to have this point of view."

So far Benni's favorite experience has been spending Christmas vacation with a host family in Connecticut. "Staying with a family 24/7 gives you a chance to get beyond the usual questions and have a chance to open up."

Throughout the tour Benni saw that WELS is a "large and strong synod across the ocean who recognizes and supports us. We share the same faith with them." Being part of a large fellowship is very encouraging, and it's even more amazing when you are blessed to see this large fellowship with your own eyes!

But Benni isn't the only one who has been blessed by the year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Prof. Sorum says, "Benni has been a wonderful addition to our seminary family. He brings an important perspective to our classroom discussions. He brings a special charm to every interaction with his American cohorts. Benni's

visit has expanded our grasp and appreciation of an international Lutheran fellowship."

"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." When you think of fellowship, remember Benni—the German seminary student with a heart for people—having conversations about Christ from Leipzig to Mequon to Connecticut to Houston to Denver.

Written by Jennifer Wolfgramm, wife of a world missionary on the Europe mission team

Your partnership in the gospel

Dear Friend of Missions,

It's amazing to see a new believer "get" the gospel for the first time. There's excitement, joy, and appreciation from understanding that Jesus saved them. It's one of the main reasons I enjoy being a missionary. I have the great privilege of being front and center as God's gospel brings more people into his family.

I've also enjoyed working with our ministry partners. God has blessed us with mature Christians who are willing to lead a group, host a Bible study, and share the gospel with others. The excitement they have witnessing God work through a breakthrough conversation, experiencing a great Bible study moment, or even planning future work is inspiring and encouraging.

And God has blessed us with ministry partners like you, located far away but united with us through Christ and the Holy Spirit. We are incredibly blessed and grateful for the prayers and offerings given by WELS members. Thank you! My appreciation for these partnerships reminds me of Paul's emotion in the start of his letter to the Philippians.

We know we can't do this work as just two families. But, if we model gospel work in simple ways and equip and encourage others, with God's gracious blessing, our reach multiplies, and the excitement does too.

If you haven't already done so, please prayerfully consider making a gift to support this new outreach effort. To get to be a part of this mission work is an honor, and to get to do it with all these brothers and sisters in Christ in Australia and in the U.S. is humbling and exciting. Praise God for the good work he is doing in us and through us—together.

Serving the Risen Savior,
Peter Janke
Missionary to Australia

P.S. Read more about the Australian mission and the service of my fellow missionary Matt Doebler and his wife, Christine, in the April Forward in Christ.

The above items recently appeared on our synod's webpage: www.wels.net.

What's going on at St. Michael's

- Outreach visits continue to be scheduled this month. As the weather get nicer consider reaching out with gospel invitations to residents in our community. Contact Pastor Westenberg if interested.
- The Peter Plan continues at St. Michael's in a prayerful effort to bring back inactive members to faithful attendance at worship and Bible study. Volunteers are still needed to contact inactive brothers and sisters in Christ. Continue circling your name each time you attend so we can have an accurate record of attendance and can focus on reaching those members in need of encouragement.
- We're looking for a person(s) to offer custodial care at church since our current person will be leaving the area soon. If interested, contact Jonathan Mayer (402-470-7138) or Pastor (715-650-0332).
- The outdoor service at Merrick Park is being moved to the Fountain City Park on Sunday, August 3 to coordinate with our VBS at the FC Park on Aug. 2.
- Thursday evening worship at St. Michael's is now being held at 6:30pm.
- Pastor returned his call to Zion, Valentine, NE. Thank you for your prayers and encouraging words.

Calendar Highlights

- Long Range Planning, Mon. May 5, 7pm
- Elder/Peter Plan mtg., Wed. May 7, 5:15pm
- 19-min. Bible study, Weds. May 7 & 21, 6:30pm
- Ladies Aid mtg. Sat. May 10, 9am
- Confirmation, Sun. May 11, 9:30am
- Bible study at The Landing, Fri. May 16, 8am
- Bd. of Elders mtg., Tue, May 20, 4pm
- Outreach Committee mtg., Tue., May 20, 5:30pm
- Church Council mtg., Tue. May 20, 7pm
- Ascension Service at Christ, Thu. May 29, 6:30pm

Your Council Members

Jonathan Mayer	President/Education
Ryan Ligman	Secretary
Mark Horstman	Outreach
Jim Baures	Treasurer/Stewardship
Jess Veraguth	Properties
Mike Baures	Financial Secretary/Elders

Those Who Help

Ushers for May

Jim Baures
Jess Veraguth
Nick Suhr
Richard Baures

Benjamin Suhr
Dave Ernst
Chance Ernst
Daniel Wantock

Altar Guild for May

Marjean Conradt
Jessica Heuer

Sandy Daily
Brenda Burt

Money Counters for May

Harry Putz

Gerry Thaldorf

Ushers for June

Mark Horstman
Mike Baures
Christopher Hund

Todd Klinger
Richard Suhr
Hale Madsen

Altar Guild for June

Diane Baures
Katie Duerr
Amanda Brakke

Kamryn Hund
Amy Jilk
Trinity Jilk

Money Counters for June

Roger Bechly

Kevin Buswell

The Coulee Region OWLS will be holding their monthly meeting on Thursday, May 8, 2025 at First Ev. Lutheran Church, 400 West Avenue South, La Crosse, at 12:00 Noon for a potluck luncheon. Please bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Coffee will be provided. All church members – men and women age 55 or older- are welcome. Please come for a visit, enjoy the friends you meet, a good lunch and a good program. The program will be the children from First Lutheran School giving their Spring Play. There will be a free will offering.

Pre-K registration is open at St. Matthew Lutheran School, Winona. Go on the Pre-K website and fill out the Pre-K registration form (under the How to Enroll tab). Registration forms and the \$50 fee can be turned into the office. Please get them in as fast as you can. Pre-K as well as K-8 are included in Buffalo Lutheran School support. To contribute to this support that helps to provide Christian education for our youth, please use the green envelopes with your first-fruit offerings.

Love in Action: Caring for Mental Health

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. One in five adults faces a mental health challenge each year. Jesus calls us to love one another, not just in words but in action. Whether in our families, schools, churches, or workplaces, we can extend compassion and support. Christian Family Solutions offers gospel-centered counseling and resources to help those in need. Learn more at ChristianFamilySolutions.org.