



# Good News-Letter

St. Michael's Ev. Lutheran Church

September 2025

A Member of the WELS

*A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any... (Lk 13:6)*

Jesus told this parable about a barren fig tree to some people who had tragedy on their mind. They were telling Jesus about an incident in which the Roman governor Pontius Pilate had sent soldiers into the temple area. There they slaughtered some Galileans while they were sacrificing at the temple. Scripture and history do not say much about the incident. And Jesus doesn't mention who was to blame. He simply wanted people to know that they were not any less sinful than those who died in the temple.

Jesus also cited the tragic death of 18 people who were crushed when a tower fell on them. Were those 18 more deserving than anyone else in Jerusalem to have a tower collapse on them? Jesus tells them, "No." But there was one thing Jesus wanted people to learn from these tragic deaths: *"Unless you repent, you too will all perish"* (Lk 13:5).

So people would appreciate the opportunity they had to repent, Jesus tells a story. A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He wanted to enjoy its fruit. When the tree was mature enough to produce fruit, the man came to get some. But there was none. For three years he came looking for fruit. And for three years he went home empty handed. Finally, he had enough. He told the man who took care of his vineyard to cut down the fig tree. If it wasn't going to produce fruit, then he didn't want it using up any nutrients from the soil. But the man who cared for the vineyard asked for an extended grace period. Give it another year. He'd work the soil and fertilize it. Then they'd wait and see if any fruit would grow.

Jesus told this story in order to show people how important it was that they repent. He wanted them to appreciate the opportunity they did have to repent.

When we look back on our life, we realize that we have given our Lord good reason to cut us down and throw us into eternal hellfire. Look at the many opportunities he gives us to trust him. But instead, we complain and question and doubt his goodness. When temptation

comes our way we might concern ourselves more with what others might think if we got caught, than what God thinks as he witnesses every secret and not so secret sin. When faced with trouble how often we fail to turn to him in prayer and arrogantly decide we can handle the problem ourselves. When you look back and realize how fruitless your life has been, we've given our God every reason to reject us?

Thankfully our Savior came through for us. John writes in his first epistle: *"If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 1:1, 2). Jesus made it possible so that we do not have to endure the punishment for our sins. God's Son did that for us. He came to earth and took on human flesh. He rejected every temptation to sin. He suffered through God's punishment for every sin. And following his death, he was raised back to life to assure us of forgiveness.

We now have reason to repent of our sins to receive God's full and free forgiveness. Take advantage of it. Don't try and hide your sin. Don't feel it's no big deal. John also wrote, *"If we confess our sins, (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). Appreciate the opportunity the Lord gives you to repent.

Our Lord wants so much for people to make use of their opportunity to repent. Jesus doesn't want any to delay in heartfelt repentance. In Jesus' story of the fig tree grace was extended. But grace would come to an end. And if no fruit was found, the tree's life was ended.

We don't know what the future will bring. But since we are sinful by nature, it's safe to say that we will fail our Lord again and again. That's why it's so important that we make use of every opportunity we have to repent. When you join other in worship each week, treasure the time spent in confession and absolution. There isn't a soul among us that doesn't need to repent. And how many in our community, in our family, in our church family have neglected the privilege to repent. God bless our efforts in reaching out to them during this time of grace. But be urgent about it. The time will soon end.

## Another convention filled with blessings

The synod convention, held in July at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., made some important decisions. It adopted a new long-range strategic plan, setting the direction and focus of the synod for the next ten years. It adopted the ministry financial plan, which details how the synod will fund its various ministries. And it changed the way that elections for synod officers (president, vice presidents, and secretary) will be held in the future. Instead of the current practice of delegates nominating individuals for those offices at the synod convention, delegates will make those nominations several months prior to the convention. Once the ballot is established (based on the number of nominations), the ballot will be posted, giving delegates an opportunity to learn more about the nominees.

This convention also elected three new synod officers. The two vice presidents and the recording secretary are part-time positions, so parish pastors serving in these positions continue to serve their congregations. Rev. Joel Voss of Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, (who had been serving as the second vice president since 2009), was elected to a four-year term as the first vice president. Rev. John Bortulin of St. John, Mukwonago, Wis., was elected to a two-year term as second vice president. Rev. Tyler Peil of Prince of Peace, Taylorsville, Utah, was elected to a four-year term as recording secretary. Ending their time of service were Rev. James Huebner (first vice president) and Rev. Robert Pasbrig (recording secretary). We thank God for their faithful service and pray for God's blessings on those who were newly elected.

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder

## Celebrating the past

Rev. Joel Otto, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., recapped 175 years of WELS history in his presentation to delegates Tuesday afternoon. Otto, the chairman of WELS' 175th Anniversary Planning Committee, wove together photos and stories to illustrate God's surprising grace to WELS in areas such as home and world missions, ministerial education, and synodical leadership.

Otto made the following anniversary applications for WELS members:

- Remember God's faithfulness to his promise that the gospel will be preached; by his grace, "Christ through us."
- Confession for our shortcomings; trust in God's grace and forgiveness.

- Appreciate God's victories through sinful and flawed people.
- Teach a new generation about God's surprising grace to and through WELS for 175 years.
- Give thanks for God's enduring love to us.

After the presentation, each delegate received a complimentary copy of *Christ Through Us: A Pictorial History of the Wisconsin Synod, 1850-2025*, co-authored by Otto and Rev. John Braun, another anniversary committee member.

In the evening, Martin Luther College Professor Paul Koelpin provided a presentation on the history of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Koelpin saw this as one of the purposes of his presentation: "Especially in this anniversary year, it seems to me that we should be thinking of what kind of heritage our church body has given to us. This is the college where we train future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers. If you know the history of how the college started in this place and then what happened over time, it helps you understand the growth and adjustment and change of the synod in general."

## "Christ through us" long-range strategic plan adopted

On the final day of the 68th biennial convention, delegates were first reminded by Rev. Jesse Stern, pastor at Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., in the opening devotion that "the joy of Christ *for* us is the privilege of Christ *through* us."

Floor Committee #18: Elections announced the 23 men who were elected to synodical positions and who will be serving various boards and commissions in upcoming years.

Delegates then heard from Floor Committee #9: "Christ through us" Long-Range Strategic Plan. Its single resolution recommended that delegates adopt the revised 2025 long-range strategic plan and urged "all areas of WELS ministry, under the direction of the Synodical Council, to establish SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) objectives for ministry, to fund and implement them with the four priorities and 20 goals of the long-range plan, and to ensure that the initial set of these SMART objectives and corresponding Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is included in the 2026 *Report to the Twelve Districts*."

Several delegates commented on the plan. Some asked for more clarification and direction on how to communicate and use this plan in their local congregations. Others encouraged exploring new ways

to reach out with the gospel—especially to the younger generation—and emphasized the importance of everyone being involved in outreach to their families, friends, and acquaintances.

“This is an exciting time,” said Rev. Dan Baumler, a member of the long-range strategic plan floor committee. “We are not just talking about [the issues] in little groups. No. Together we’re saying this is what we face. There are blessings, but let’s go, let’s tackle this, let’s trust our leaders. I hope everyone here is excited about where we’re going because of this plan that clearly maps out what we’re facing. And we’re going to do it together.” Delegates adopted the resolution and the revised long-range strategic plan, available [here](#).

WELS President Mark Schroeder then introduced Dr. Matthew Harrison, the president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, who briefly addressed the delegates.

“Our dialogue with your guys has been the highlight of my professional career,” he said. “To rediscover that dialogue and have conversations with [President Mark Schroeder] and the rest of your guys has been a pleasure beyond which I know of no others as the president of the Missouri Synod. You push us toward the Scriptures.”

He continued, “Thank you for standing for the truths. . . . Thank you for confessing, thank you for being who you are, thank you for keeping the faith. We covet your prayers . . . God bless you in all your worthy endeavors.”

In his final remarks as the convention came to a close, President Schroeder encouraged delegates to remember what they experienced and share what they learned with their congregations. “Above all we recognize that everything we do, every mission we undertake, every worship service we hold, is focused on one person, and that’s Christ. On his grace. On his promises. On the work that he did for us.”

## Closing service sends delegates home with encouragement from God’s Word

“Look back at all the memorial stones. Look back at that really cool memorial stone [the one that temporarily sealed Jesus’ tomb], and thank God for his goodness, his power, and his love. And then look forward and trust God to continue to display that goodness, power, and love in your life and the life of his church.”

Rev. Doug Free, president of the Dakota-Montana District, used those words to conclude his sermon for the closing service of the 68th Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Free based

his sermon on Joshua 4:1-9. The service took place in the Chapel of the Christ on the campus of Martin Luther College (MLC) in New Ulm, Minn.

MLC President Rev. Rich Gurgel was the presiding minister of the service, and MLC student Ben Foster served as organist.

During the service, Gurgel installed into office Rev. Joel Voss (Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio) as the newly-elected first vice president of the synod and Rev. John Bortulin (St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.) as the newly-elected second vice president. Recording Secretary Rev. Tyler Peil (Prince of Peace, Taylorsville, Utah), also elected at this convention, was unable to be present for the installation.

The service closed with an MLC tradition: the a cappella singing of “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage,” sung to the tune Friedrich (Fritz) Reuter, a Dr. Martin Luther College music professor, composed in 1916.

Mr. Greg Bartz, a lay delegate from St. John’s, Sleepy Eye, Minn., was attending his first synod convention. What impressed him about the closing service was the singing. “With all the pastors there and teachers and laypeople, the singing just added to the beauty of the service. My ninth-grade choir teacher told me I couldn’t sing, and so I normally don’t, but when it was so loud, I felt I could sing because nobody was going to hear me.”

But it was not just the closing service that made an impression. Bartz noted, “The one thing that impressed me with the convention was the unity. We all pretty much agreed on everything.”

So with the encouragement of God’s Word, the delegates headed home.

*The above items recently appeared on our synod’s webpage: [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).*

## What’s going on at St. Michael’s

- Outreach visits are scheduled for the 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays this month. We need help canvassing communities in our area with gospel invites. If you are interested in helping, contact Pastor.
- The Peter Plan continues at St. Michael’s in a prayerful effort to bring back inactive members. Volunteers are still needed for contacting them. Keep circling your name each time you attend worship so we can have an accurate record to help us reach members in need of encouragement—“*Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing. Rather, let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*” (He 10:25)

- Our search for custodial care at St. Michael's has led us to hire Eric Moe. We thank Eric for his willingness to serve us.
- This month we get back into Christian education with catechism lessons on Weds., and Sunday School lessons at 8:15am beginning Sept. 7.
- Pastor Westenberg continues serving the vacancy at Christ, Cochrane. Pray that they receive a pastor soon.

#### Calendar Highlights

- Catechism begins, Wed. Sep. 3, 3:30pm
- Elder/Peter Plan mtg., Wed. Sep. 3, 5pm
- 19-min. Bible study, Weds. Sep. 3 & 17, 6:30pm
- Worship Planning, Sat. Sep. 6, 8am
- Sunday School begins, Sun. Sep. 7, 8:15am
- Choir practice begins, Sun. Sep. 7, 10:40am
- Pastors Conf., 1<sup>st</sup> Luth. LAX, Tue. Sep. 9, 9am
- Ladies Aid mtg. Sat. Sep. 13, 9am
- Christian Ed. Sunday, Sep. 14, 9:30am
- Outreach Committee mtg., Tue., Sep. 16, 5:30pm
- Church Council mtg., Tue., Sep. 16, 7pm,
- Bible study at The Landing, Fri. Sep. 19, 8am
- SS Teacher mtg., Mon. Sep. 29, 7pm

#### *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 September**

Mike Baures	Harry Putz
Mark Horstman	Zach Czaplewski
Paul Churchill	Brayden Stiehl
Brandon Churchill	

##### **Altar Guild for September**

Debbie Putz	Ruth Hohmann
Chris Buswell	Sandy Isakson

##### **Money Counters for September**

Roger Bechly	Kevin Buswell
--------------	---------------

##### **Ushers for October**

Ryan Ligman	Richard Conrad
Jonathan Mayer	Darrel McCutchen
James Veraguth	David Herzberg
Gerald Suhr	

##### **Altar Guild for October**

Sharon Wick	Sadie Baures
Jennifer Baures	Laura Madsen

#### **Money Counters for October**

Elroy Conradt

Mike Baures

**The Coulee Region OWLS** will be holding their monthly meeting on Thursday, September 11, 2025 at First Ev. Lutheran Church, 400 West Ave., La Crosse with a Potluck Luncheon at 12:00 Noon. 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. The program will be “Outreach to China – 316 NOW”. This is an organization of WELS to reach missionaries in China. Please come to a visit, enjoy the friends you meet, a good lunch, and an excellent program. There will be a free will offering.

**Special 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**—The psalmist urges us to “tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done” (Ps 78:4). This includes the gracious work our God has done in the history of his church. In fact, Psalm 78 devotes over 60 verses to recounting the various episodes from Israel's history. This year, as we mark the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Wisconsin Synod, resources have been produced to help us remember and tell the praiseworthy deeds our gracious God has done for and through WELS.

- *Christ Through Us: A Pictorial History of the Wisconsin Synod, 1850-2025*
- *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, Second Edition*, the updated telling of the synod's history
- A Bible study on WELS history is now available that coordinates with *Christ Through Us: A Pictorial History of the Wisconsin Synod, 1850-2025* (This study will be offered at St. Michael's at 8:15am beginning Sundays in October)
- Upcoming presentations related to our synod's history include the following:
  - September 13 at 10:00am at the WELS Museum in Milwaukee - *175 Years of Hymnals in WELS* by Carl Nolte.
  - October 19 at 3:00pm at Luther Preparatory School in Watertown and available through livestream - *The History of Our Watertown Preparatory Schools* by President Mark Schroeder.

*Save the date!*



The next WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership will be held January 19-21, 2026.