



# Good News-Letter

St. Michael's Ev. Lutheran Church

January 2026

A Member of the WELS

*He saved us—not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified<sup>d</sup> by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life. This saying is trustworthy. (Titus 3:5-8a)*

This is the last of five “trustworthy” sayings in the pastoral epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. He saved us. This is an historic fact. God in human flesh appeared and rescued us. We are not delivered in any way, shape, or form by our own righteousness—any merit or worthiness that we have. The only cause for our rescue is God’s kindness and love for the world. God’s love and kindness appeared at the conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Baptism is a means by which we receive his salvation. The Holy Spirit is poured out on us through baptism. As in baptism, all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned here. In baptism there is rebirth, being brought to faith, being made a new creature in God. This rebirth is also renewal. *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”* (2 Co 5:17). Before there was only the sinful flesh. Now there is new life in Christ. There was no life as far as God was concerned. Now we are alive to God.

God’s purpose in all of this is that we might become his heirs, with the inheritance of eternal life waiting for us. We are justified, pronounced completely innocent of any sin. And now that we have been brought to faith, we are heirs of God, waiting to assume our eternal homes in heaven, where we have an endless stream of blessings from God waiting for us.

We have an age-old problem. We are not as sanctified as we should be. What is the solution to this problem? More law? We do need the law when we are comfortable in our sin. But this does not produce sanctification or holy living. Look what Paul does to produce sanctification. He relies on the gospel, and then more gospel. He had pointed out in Titus chapter two: “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all” (2:11).

Paul reminds us of the final result of God’s gift—we are heirs of eternal life. Paul knows that this good news will bring about a change in us. Paul then points out in the verse following this section: *“I want you to insist on these things, so that those who believe in God are intent on keeping busy with good works”* (3:8). Stressing the gospel leads God’s people to devote themselves to doing good.

On occasion it’s good to ponder the miseries of sin and everything that goes with it. We lived in sin and still have a sinful nature. We lived in a slime pit with no way to crawl out. Then stop after a couple of minutes. Now ponder what God has done for you. God’s Son died for you. You are now an heir of eternal life. Ponder this until you are filled with joy and gratitude. Then think about how to share this with people.

This month we get focus on our own baptism with the Baptism of the Lord the second Sunday in January. What amazing grace that Jesus was willing to be baptized when he had absolutely no sin to be washed clean. He simply wanted to be one with us in every way, even willing to take on the guilt of our sin and give his life in payment for sin on a cursed cross. In exchange for our sin, he clothes us with his holiness that we wear by faith. Now we appear holy and righteous before God.

And we want our lives to show that we are baptized children of God. Luther reminds us of what that means in his Small Catechism: *Baptism means that the sinful nature in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.* (Baptism, part 4)

What will motivate us for such sanctified living? God will. God is kind. God is loving. God is merciful. God is gracious. God has saved. God has given a new birth and a new life. God has poured out his Spirit. God has declared the unrighteous to be righteous. He’s done all this through baptism. Those baptized in Christ have become a part of the family of God and thus heirs with the hope of eternal life. Baptism, therefore, saves us. Value this washing through which the Holy Spirit gives us new birth and new life. Celebrate your baptism!

## Join the global gospel movement this Christmas

Dear Christian Friend,

This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we're reminded that more than 6.5 billion people live where the name of Jesus is scarcely known. The "Commission" priority of WELS' long-range strategic plan calls us to extend our confessional Lutheran witness beyond familiar borders, forging partnerships and equipping a global missionary force to share Christ's love with a world in need.

Now is the time to unite in prayer, generosity, and action, supporting efforts that spark the movement of the gospel across continents.

### Will you join us in this global movement?

God has provided a new mission opportunity in Senegal. Missionary Dan Kroll will soon begin outreach among the Wolof people, a tribe where 99 percent identify as Muslim. The work starts with learning language and culture, building relationships, and sharing the hope of Christ. You'll soon receive a mailing with more details.

Will you help us bring the light of Christ to those who have never heard his name? Your gift to the New World Mission Fields Fund will directly support outreach in Senegal.

**Thank you for your faithful support.** Your prayers and gifts make it possible to bring the gospel to places where Christ's name is barely known. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior this Christmas, may the light of his love fill your heart.

In Christ's service,  
Rev. Larry Schlomer  
Administrator, WELS World Missions

P.S. Read a special *Forward in Christ* article that shares inspiring stories of pioneering missions—including Dan Kroll's work in Senegal and other efforts to reach the unreached. (*Dan Kroll & John Hildebrant are classmates of Pastor Westenberg*)

## Reaching out to new people groups with the gospel

For Christians in the developed world, it's hard to imagine places where the gospel cannot be easily shared. In fact, of the more than 8 billion people alive today, as many as 40 percent—more than 3 billion souls—belong to "unreached people groups," or communities with little to no opportunity to hear about Jesus' saving work.

WELS Board for World Missions has recently called experienced WELS missionaries to reach two such groups: the Wolof people of Senegal in West Africa and the Hindi-speaking population of India. "Both of these people groups are in deep need of the gospel," explains Larry Schlomer, administrator of the Board for World Missions. "The Wolof tribe is less than 1 percent Christian, and the Hindi government has created procedures that allow a public spectacle to be made of anyone who leaves the Hindu faith."

In the West African country of Senegal, approximately 95 percent of the population is Muslim; among the Wolof tribe specifically, that is closer to 98 or 99 percent. Daniel Kroll—a longtime WELS missionary in Africa who accepted the call to Senegal—and his wife, Karen, are preparing for their new mission field. "This will be an opportunity to reach a people who have been largely unexposed to the message of Christ," says Kroll. "We hope to reflect his patience and forgiveness toward us, to impact the Wolof culture so that it can include Christ as the Savior for many."

Although Senegalese law protects freedom of religion and does allow foreign Christian missionaries to live there, how they will be received within Wolof communities remains to be seen. Because there is no existing contact group or established church among the Wolof, this mission will begin from the ground up. The Krolls will live in a Wolof home for a minimum of six months. "We will strive to learn the Wolof language and culture to be able to bring the gospel message of Jesus in a kind and loving way," says Kroll.

Over the next two years, they will build relationships, discover how best to build trust in a Muslim culture, and identify community members open to Christianity who might eventually lead small groups of believers. Possible outreach efforts—such as English classes, tutoring, or vocational training—will be explored only after the missionaries better understand the local culture.

At the same time, John Hildebrant is preparing for mission work within the Asia-Oceania Team. His initial focus will be to live in India for one year while studying the Hindi language at a school in Mussoorie. Through this immersion, he will gain insight into South Asian values and communication styles, preparing him to teach, build relationships, and share God's Word effectively with Hindi people groups across Asia and Oceania.

Next, Hildebrant will relocate to Chiang Mai, Thailand, where many missionaries on the team reside. From there, the team will determine how Hildebrant's gifts can best be used within its purview. "Pastor Hildebrant

served in India for many years,” Schlomer explains. “He has worked in the Hindi language before and will be able to use that experience to engage in new work quickly.”

For many of the people embedded within the Wolof and Hindi cultures, converting to Christianity means giving up pieces of their family and community heritage—often severing relational ties in the process. “God’s miraculous Word will need to go to work to place faith and conviction into hearts,” says Schlomer.

Though both fields present immense challenges, World Missions’ purpose remains the same. “We are asking the Lord to use us to reach new people in these fields,” says Schlomer. “We haven’t met them yet. Our prayer is that God would open doors for the gospel in the ways that only he can.”

## Pioneering the gospel in unreached areas

Dear Christian Friend,

As we approach Christmas—a season when we celebrate the birth of our Savior and the hope he brings to the world—we’re reminded that more than 6.5 billion souls, over two-thirds of humanity, live in places where the name of Jesus is scarcely known. These are not just numbers; they are individuals, families, and communities waiting to experience the life-changing hope found in the gospel. This Christmas, as we rejoice in the gift of Christ, we remember our calling as his ambassadors, sent to proclaim the saving message of Jesus to every nation under heaven. Through us, Christ reaches the nations.

For 175 years, God has blessed WELS with opportunities to bring the gospel to new lands. Yet the mission remains unfinished. Millions are born and die each year without access to the truth we hold so dear. With renewed urgency and prayerful confidence, we look to the future, asking God to use us to reach lost souls with his Word of salvation. This is “Christ through us”—a mission that knows no borders, limits, or barriers too great for God’s grace.

As part of WELS’ long-range strategic plan, we’ve set a goal to “Pioneer missions in high-risk and unreached areas.” This is a bold commitment to go where the gospel is least known and access is most restricted. We trust God to open doors and prepare hearts.

God has opened two remarkable new mission fields. In Senegal, One Africa Team Missionary Dan Kroll has accepted a relocation to begin outreach among the Wolof people—a tribe where 99 percent identify as Muslim. The work will begin with learning language

and culture, building relationships, and seeking every opportunity to share the gospel. Plans are underway to add a second missionary to the Senegal team, joining Kroll in immersion and outreach. Together, these missionaries will plant seeds of faith, train local leaders, and gather believers who will share Christ in their own communities.

Senegal is just one example of the vast need in the “10/40 window”—a region stretching from West Africa to East Asia between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude, home to the greatest concentration of unreached people groups on earth. In this window, billions live without access to the gospel. The spiritual darkness is profound, and the need for new workers, resources, and prayer is greater than ever. The opportunity before us is urgent: to bring the light of Christ to those who have never heard his name, to offer hope where there is none, and to answer the call to reach the lost.

Will you help us pioneer these new world mission fields? Your gift to the New World Mission Fields Fund will support outreach to the Wolof tribe in Senegal and other high-risk, unreached areas. This Christmas, as you reflect on God’s greatest gift to us, consider sharing that gift with those who have yet to hear the good news. Together, we can answer Christ’s call to go, to send, and to pray—trusting that his promise will not fail.

With hope, humility, and boldness, we entrust our efforts to the Lord of the harvest, confident that he will accomplish far more than we could ever ask or imagine. This is Christ through us.

In Christ’s service,  
Rev. Larry Schlomer  
Administrator, WELS World Missions

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the resolve of WELS World Missions and our synod to “pioneer missions in high-risk and unreached areas.” Guide, protect, and bless Missionary Dan Kroll as he begins work in Senegal, Africa, among the Wolof tribe, which is 99 percent Muslim. We ask you to also go with Rev. John Hildebrandt, who has accepted the call to serve on the Asia-Oceania Team, focusing on outreach to the Hindi, one of the largest unreached populations in the world. He will begin his ministry with a one-year immersion experience in India. According to your will, Lord, work through us to reach the ends of the earth with the good news of your redemption. Amen.

*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

- The Peter Plan continues at St. Michael's in a prayerful effort to bring back inactive members. We're currently reaching out to members outside our ministry area in an effort to connect them to a church close by. Keep circling your name as 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)
- We will end the year in worship with members of Christ in Cochrane in a joint Communion Service held in Cochrane at 6:30pm on Dec. 31.
- We'll hold an Epiphany Service at 6:30pm on Tuesday, January 6. Following the service, we will take down the Christmas decorations at church.
- Our annual voters meeting will be held Sunday, January 18 at 2pm. All reports for the 2025 annual report need to be sent to Pastor Westenberg at [dmweste@gmail.com](mailto:dmweste@gmail.com) by Sun. January 11.
- Pastor Westenberg continues serving the vacancy at Christ, Cochrane. St. Michael's and Christ's Sunday Schools joined to conduct a Children's Christmas Service on Sun. Dec. 21 at Christ, and Wed. Dec. 24 at St. Michael's.
- Pastor will be leaving Fountain City following the annual mtg. on Jan. 18 to attend the WELS Leadership Conference at the Hyatt in Chicago, Jan. 19-21 followed by a ten-day vacation trip to Florida. If you are in need of pastoral care while he is gone, contact our Circuit Pastor Peter Snyder at 608-479-0778.

#### Calendar Highlights

- Worship Planning mtg., Sat. Jan. 3, 8am
- Long Range Planning mtg., Mon. Jan. 5, 7pm
- Epiphany Service, Tue. Jan. 6, 6:30pm
- Bd. of Elders mtg., Wed. Jan 7, 5pm
- Outreach Committee mtg., Wed., Jan. 7, 6pm
- Church Council mtg., Wed., Jan. 7, 7pm
- Stewardship mtg. Thu., Jan. 8, 6pm
- Ladies Aid mtg., Sat. Dec. 10, 9am
- Bible study at The Landing, Fri. Jan. 16, 8am
- Annual mtg. Sun., Jan. 18, 2pm

#### 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 January**

Jonathan Mayer	Richard Putz
Ryan Ligman	Merlyn Klebig
Stanley Steward	Greg Parnow
John Schlesselman	

##### **Altar Guild for January**

Denise Bechly	Kay Doeberdt
Angie Anderson	Wanda Putz

##### **Money Counters for January**

Elroy Conradt	Mike Baures
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##### **Ushers for February**

Jess Veraguth	Eric Horstman
Jim Baures	Elliot Kozlowski
Andrew Wolfe	Samuel Westenberg
Brian Baures	

##### **Altar Guild for February**

Susan Horstman	Lisa Braaten
Mary Veraguth	Beverly Thaldorf

##### **Money Counters for February**

Harry Putz	Gerry Thaldorf
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REFORMATION/GERMANY TOUR. You are invited to join a 12-day (April 20-May 1, 2026) tour of Germany emphasizing sites of the Reformation. Places like Wittenberg, Worms, Wartburg, Eisleben, Erfurt are included. Non-religious sites include Berlin, Mainz, Rothenburg, Rhine River cruise etc.. There is an optional 3-day extension to Munich, Oberammergau, Neushwanstin Castle etc. The tour will be hosted by retired pastor Eugene Kock who has been to Germany many times. For more info.: [pastorkock@yahoo.com](mailto:pastorkock@yahoo.com).

## 2026 WELS Youth Rally

### CHRIST THROUGH US

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

July 14-17, 2026

Bowling Green State University  
Bowling Green, Ohio

Registration Runs March—May  
\$450 Early Bird Rate until April 30  
\$475 May 1-29