



# Good News-Letter

St. Michael's Ev. Lutheran Church

May 2026

A Member of the WELS

*Always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:20)*

Every day should be a day of thanksgiving. We thank God daily for his many blessings. We thank him that he forgives us for the times we fail to thank him. We sometimes complain when things don't go our way. We should find nothing to complain about except our own weakness and ingratitude.

We know we ought to give thanks to God. We remind ourselves time and time again that we have so many things to be thankful for—his mercies are new every morning. But why don't we feel more thankful? Why is it hard to be grateful? Why do we feel entitled to all the blessings we receive from his gracious hand?

Many years ago, King David knew his heart was not what it ought to be. He came to the Lord and prayed the prayer we speak so often in our worship: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). We need to remember that a right spirit is a gift of God. Only the Holy Spirit can give us true humility and gratitude.

Pride keeps us from being thankful. But God's law works in us that knowledge of the consciousness of our sin. We know we deserve from God nothing but wrath and punishment. Then we know that every drop of water that cools our tongue and every breath of air we breathe is a gracious gift of our Father's love. When we compare what we deserve with what we get, our heart will no more complain. It will only praise the goodness of the Lord.

When we realize our sin and the wrath of God we deserve, we will only be filled with fear. Then we are comforted that the Holy Spirit comes to us and convinces us of the Savior's love and God's forgiving grace. We know the love of God, which is seen so clearly in the cross. We understand that all things that come to us, whatever they be, come from the loving heart of God. They must all work together for our good. Once we learn this, we can truly give thanks always for all things. Then we look at thanksgiving, not as a duty but as a privilege that we have through Christ. For this gratitude in our heart from the Holy Spirit we should also be thankful.

The advice is given that if we are truly thankful, we will count our blessings one by one and we will soon see we have much to be thankful for. But where shall we begin and where shall we end? We could begin with our fingernails that protect our sensitive fingertips. Continue with all the marvelous wonders of creation that proclaim to glory of God and was made to serve our welfare. But Paul doesn't say we should just pick out things to be thankful for. He says we should give thanks always for all things. Do you know what that means?

It means that everything that happens to us in life is something we should be grateful for. We count our blessings. We should also count our sorrows and our heartaches that bring us closer to God. They make us realize how futile and empty our lives would be without our Savior. We ought to be thankful for the bitter disappointments in life which made us realize that only the blessings of God can prosper our efforts. We ought to give thanks for the temptations we face in life. They give us opportunities to show our love for our Lord who loved us to death. We ought to be thankful for our sicknesses. They cause us to turn to the Great Physician for comfort and for help. These things, too, are meant for our good. These, too, are blessings of our Father's love.

The gratefulness of all things, for sickness and for health, for trouble and prosperity, for poverty or riches, for life or for death, is possible only when our thanksgiving is made in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know he is our Lord, that he is our Savior. Through him we call God our Father. We know that God loves us with an everlasting love. It's a love that will not let us go. It's a love so great that it lifted the Son of God to a cross and laid him in a grave. But that love continued as he came back to life on Easter. We continue to celebrate his Easter victory the first half of this month. Then we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, followed by a Sunday to observe his revelation as the Trinity. He comes to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three separate persons yet one Holy God. So give thanks always to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## Conference of Presidents spring mtg.

The Conference of Presidents (COP) met for its spring meeting April 8-9. Here are some of the items they discussed or decided:

- Three new COP members were chosen as COP representatives on the Synodical Council (SC). Pastor Joel Heckendorf (Arizona-California), Pastor Michael Seifert (North Atlantic), and Pastor Dennis Klatt (Minnesota) will attend their first SC meeting in November.
- The COP spent time preparing for the upcoming assignment days at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., and Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., in May. They will be facing the continuing challenge of a shortage of called workers. The number of teacher candidates at MLC is smaller than in recent years. The class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is the largest in several years. The candidates are all blessings from God and will reduce—but not eliminate—the many vacancies in congregations and schools. The COP continues to encourage all members to help recruit future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.
- The COP proposed a standardized interview process and supporting evaluation tools for district presidents to use in carrying out a review of someone in pastoral, teaching, or staff ministry seeking re-entry into the ministry. The process is intended to seek increased clarity, consistency, and communication in the process.
- The COP currently grants provisional minister of the gospel status to called teachers who enroll in MLC's Teaching Ministry Certification program (a program pursued by individuals who already hold an accredited teaching degree). MLC now offers online degree programs that include both professional training and the full set of ministry certification requirements. The COP monitors these programs.
- The COP discussed the importance of maintaining a "living" procedural document for COP use entitled "Divine Call Policies—Procedures—Guidelines."
- The COP received a number of reports from Congregational Services, highlighting record levels of adult confirmation and efforts to reduce backdoor membership losses. A complete analysis of congregational statistics, along with a summary, will be released later this spring.
- Pastor Kurt Lueneburg will be retiring this summer as the director of the Ministry of Christian Giving. The COP thanked him for his 21 years of Christian giving experience. Calling for his replacement will take place later this spring.

- Total Congregation Mission Offering subscriptions for 2026 surpassed actual giving in 2025 (although it did not keep up with inflation).
- The COP will lead training for district constitution committees in light of differing governance models being considered by congregations.

This was the last regular meeting of the COP for four district presidents as they will be completing their time of service as district presidents at the district conventions this summer. Pastor Donald Patterson (South Central) has accepted a call, Pastor Charles Westra (South Atlantic) is not seeking reelection, and Pastors Joel Zank (Northern Wisconsin) and Douglas Free (Dakota-Montana) are retiring. We pray for God's continued blessings and thank them for their service.

With new district presidents to be elected this summer, the COP will experience significant changes in its membership. We pray for God's blessings as those conventions elect their leaders.

## A simple way to encourage pastors

Dear Friend,

Pastors are gifts from the risen and ascended Savior, who sits at the right hand of the Father. Ephesians 4:11-13 says as much. Thanks and praise be to Jesus—the 1,400 active pastors of WELS are gifts from him! The congregation I attend is blessed to have two of those pastors—and a vicar (future pastor, Lord willing). My family and I are very thankful that these men have set their hearts on serving God's people with Word and sacrament.

The other members of our congregation are thankful too, and I would like to tell you about two of them: a married couple with grown children. About seven years ago, the husband was moved by a *Forward in Christ* article about the struggles and challenges a pastor was facing. He talked to his wife about the article, and together they asked: What can we do to support the pastors of our church body? After prayerful consideration and some research, he and his wife decided to start the Grow in Grace Endowment Fund at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Grow in Grace is the part of the seminary that supports pastors by partnering with them for their spiritual and professional growth. Grow in Grace does this in four areas of ministry:

1. Formal continuing education: We provide for-credit courses for the pastors of WELS and sister church bodies from around the world. Every biennium, about 200 pastors take such a course.

2. Informal continuing education: We produce and distribute informal continuing education resources that pastors can read on their own. We offer not-for-credit presentations. Every biennium, about 600 pastors participate in these learning events.
3. Pastor Partners mentoring program: We provide a mentor for pastors during the first three years of ministry. These mentors serve as trusted friends and confidants. Many pastors have told me, “I would not have made it through the first three years of ministry if it weren’t for my mentor. Thank you.”
4. Celebration of Ministry retreats: We plan and host three-day retreats for pastors and their wives who have served in ministry for 3, 10, 25, and 35 years. The workshops are tailored to their specific station in life and ministry. Participants return to their congregations with renewed spirits.

Back to the endowment. The husband and wife began the fund in 2019. Every year since then, they have contributed \$25,000 from their IRA accounts, encouraging others to join them in this effort. In March 2026, the Grow in Grace Endowment Fund had a balance of about \$410,000. The endowment fund is set up to distribute 4 percent of its net asset value annually for the work of Grow in Grace, connecting our pastors (and their wives) to gospel-rich resources and gospel encouragers. In June of this year, this fund will help bring 12 international pastors to our on-campus Summer Quarter, and it will offer tuition assistance that makes the courses more affordable for our 1,400 active pastors.

Pastors are precious gifts from our Savior. Join me in praying for them. Join the Seminary in supporting and encouraging them. Join the couple who began this fund and the many who have contributed since it opened with a contribution to the Grow in Grace Endowment Fund. It is a great way to thank our Savior for the pastors he has provided and to support those pastors for years to come. We welcome your gifts of any amount, and we will use them in service to our pastors. Thank you.

Brad Wordell  
Director of Grow in Grace

## Climb the hill again

After nearly two weeks spent in South Asia, I have a new personal motto: *Climb the hill again*.

When people ask me where I am, they usually google it and comment on how beautiful it is. And it is truly beautiful in the foothills of the Himalayas! However, they usually don’t realize how the whole town seems to be built on the side of a hill. Everything here is either up or down. Very little is lateral or sideways.

My room (where I’m currently living out of suitcases), for example, is 6,800 feet above sea level. My language school, where I take classes every day, is more than 7,300 feet above sea level! That means every day I climb more than 500 feet (or 150 meters).

I take a bath, but when I have to climb the hill again, I get all hot and sweaty. I feel fine and well rested, but when I have to climb the hill again, my heart starts to pound, and my breathing gets heavy once again.

Do I *really* want to climb that hill again? Not really. But I must.

*Climb the hill again.*

But you would think that, once I’m at the top, at the language school, I’d have a reprieve. However, you would be wrong.

That’s an aspirated consonant not an unaspirated one. *Climb the hill again*. That’s a cerebral (with the tongue on the roof of your mouth), not a dental (with the tongue behind your teeth). *Climb the hill again*. That’s a feminine noun, not a masculine noun. *Climb the hill again*. That’s a masculine noun ending in “a” followed by the postposition, changing “ah” to “ay”! *Climb the hill again!*

Don’t get me wrong. After less than two weeks, I’m pleased that I can understand and say as much as I can! (“Whose book is on that table?” etc.) I can even say a few silly sentences about a monkey stealing my food, which is a true story! But fluency is an elusive, seemingly far away thing. It means climbing the hill over and over and over again!

But is this all that my motto really means? Physically climbing up a hillside or mentally exercising the linguistic portion of my brain? Is there not a deeper spiritual meaning to this motto as well?!

Yes. At Christmas, we climbed the hill again on which Bethlehem stands – to see our incarnate Lord and Savior, the Christ-child. On Transfiguration Sunday, many of us climbed the hill of Transfiguration again – to see Jesus in all his glory – assuring us that his passion is purposeful, not that everything was merely spiraling out of control. And, most significantly, every Lenten season we climb the hill of Calvary again to see the awful price paid for all of our sins.

*Climb the hill again.*

This motto really applies to every Christian as we daily bring our sins to the foot of the cross. *Climb the hill again!* Then, the next day, we climb the hill again, and again, and again, and again! Each time, we are assured of his grace to us! Each time, we are declared to be forgiven children of the Most High!

So, what can I do? Nothing really. Nothing but climb the hill again. Yes, climb the steps to the language

school. And climb the mental gymnastics of my mind trying to get my brain to think in another language. And most importantly climb the hill to Calvary again with my latest load of sins, dumping them there at the feet of my Savior.

Each and every day. . . .

“Climb the hill again.”

*Written by Missionary John Hildebrant, missionary on the Asia-Oceania Team*

*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

- St. Michael’s Outreach Committee is hosting an Event Planning mtg. on Sun. May 17 at 5pm to schedule fellowship events that reach out to ALL of St. Michael’s membership.
- The vacancy at Christ in Cochrane continues. The previously announced meeting with our district president hasn’t happened yet. We’ll keep you informed of any decisions that affect St. Michael’s.
- Members of St. Michael’s have responded to the storm damage that certain members received on April 17. Your prayers, donations, comforting visits, and help with clean-up are greatly appreciated. We’ll keep you informed as further needs arise.
- Spring cleaning at church is happening. See the cleaning list in the binder where you circle your name for attendance. Thank you to all for your faithful service to God’s house.
- It was decided at our last voters meeting to keep using wax candles in our candelabras.

### Calendar Highlights

- Outdoor Workday, Sat. May 2, 8am
- Confirmation Sunday, May 3, 9:30pm
- Board of Elders mtg. Wed. May 6, 5pm
- 19-min. Bible study, Wed. May 6 & 20, 6:30pm
- Ladies Aid mtg., Sat. May 9, 9am
- Ascension Service, Thu. May 14, 6:30pm
- Bible study at The Landing, Fri. May 15, 8am
- Event Planning mtg., Sun. May 17, 5pm
- Church Council mtg., Sun., May 17, 6:30pm

### *Your Council Members*

|               |                            |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Mark Horstman | President/Education        |
| Kyle Wolfe    | Secretary                  |
| Ben Kafer     | Outreach                   |
| Jim Baures    | Treasurer/Stewardship      |
| Jess Veraguth | Properties                 |
| Mike Baures   | Financial Secretary/Elders |

### Those Who Help

#### **Ushers for May**

|                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| Jim Baures     | Benjamin Suhr  |
| Jess Veraguth  | Dave Ernst     |
| Nick Suhr      | Chance Ernst   |
| Richard Baures | Daniel Wantock |

#### **Altar Guild for May**

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Sandy Daily     | Jill Thomas     |
| Jessica Heuer   | Jenni Burt      |
| Marie Grossell  | Natasha Isakson |
| Marjean Conradt |                 |

#### **Money Counters for May**

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Harry Putz | Gerry Thaldorf |
|------------|----------------|

#### **Ushers for June**

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| Mark Horstman    | Todd Klinger |
| Mike Baures      | Richard Suhr |
| Christopher Hund | Hale Madsen  |
| Ronald Hohmann   |              |

#### **Altar Guild for June**

|               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Diane Baures  | Amy Jilk     |
| Amanda Brakke | Trinity Jilk |
| Kamryn Hund   |              |

#### **Money Counters for June**

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

The **Coulee Region Owls** will be holding their regular monthly meeting on Thursday, May 14, 2026 at First Ev. Lutheran Church, 400 West Avenue South, La Crosse at Noon with a Potluck Luncheon. Please bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Coffee will be provided. The Program will be the children from First Lutheran performing their Spring Play. 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 the young children’s play. There will be a free will offering.

Dear Friend of Missions,

We invite you to join us on **Saturday, June 13**, for a day that begins with worship and the commissioning of missionaries and continues with stories, conversations, and connections from across WELS missions.

**Date:** Saturday, June 13, 2026

**Time:** 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Location:** Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. OR online!

If you’re attending in person and would like food tickets, registration is \$15 per person. Children 13 and under attend for free. Can’t make it to Mequon? Please join us online through the livestream.