



Faces of FAITH

STORIES FROM WELS MISSIONS



WELS
Christ's Love, Our Calling.

2024/2025

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD





DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIEND,

As my full-time ministry began, I took up running. Little did I know that running would lead to competing in 5K races, which led to friends convincing me to compete in a half-marathon. That's when "it's a marathon and not a sprint" hit home. You must learn to pace yourself so that you can run a strong race for the entire 13.1 miles.

That phrase can also apply to the 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative. The "race" has started with 15 new mission starts and 17 enhancements approved in the first two years. We've started strong and now need to continue going where the people are to reach more of the lost. We also want to equip our missions to thrive and not just survive. Yet, in these markets, we're seeing costs rise dramatically. Some might ask, "Is it worth the cost?" The answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might

become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). What we have wasn't purchased with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and by his innocent suffering and death. We have pardon for our sins, peace with God, and hope for this life and eternity. We are rich! And now we want to share our riches with those who are still poor.

By God's grace, we have started strong. We trust that we will continue running strong. We trust that we will continue to pray for this initiative as well as the ministry of WELS. **Because remember, it's a marathon, not a sprint.** Thank you for your partnership in the gospel that enables us to reach more lost souls with the message of forgiveness, peace, and hope through Jesus Christ!

Pastor Mark Gabb

PASTOR MARK GABB,
Home Missions administrator

WELCOME TO



157
HOME MISSION
CONGREGATIONS



HOME Missions

WELS Home Missions plants new churches and assists mission-minded congregations in the United States, Canada, and English-speaking West Indies. Home Missions currently supports 157 congregations with financial subsidy or district mission board/mission counselor assistance, with 32 of those being cross-cultural mission congregations. Home Missions also provides more than 45 campus ministries with financial support, while assisting hundreds of other congregations that serve college students around the United States and Canada.

Faces of Faith - Lincoln

"Praise the Lord!" I didn't expect him to shout that over his shoulder as he sprinted down the mountain past me and my friend, who were hiking and talking about church that Sunday afternoon. After he stopped and apologized for interrupting us, my first conversation with Lincoln began. "I wouldn't even tell a shrink half of the stuff I've done," he admitted. I responded, "Would you tell a pastor?" After talking for a few minutes about God's grace and forgiveness, I gave him my business card. He promised I'd see him next Sunday; but to be honest, I doubted I would ever see him again.

But there he was on Sunday and every Sunday after. **"I feel accepted, welcomed, and loved. There's a comfort in knowing that Pastor Jensen is always going to point me to Jesus,"** Lincoln says. Lincoln was confirmed last year and enjoys grow-

ing in God's Word through a midweek Bible class. "I love how we get deep into the Bible, but I don't feel overwhelmed or confused. It's actually fun!"

As we get ready to start our new building project, Lincoln is all-in. "We're blessed to have such an amazing church body working together to share the Word of Christ, and I'm grateful and excited to be part of it here in Las Cruces. I want everyone to be able to see what's going on here and experience God's love here like I do."

FROM NATHANAEL JENSEN, home missionary at Cross of Christ in Las Cruces, N.M.



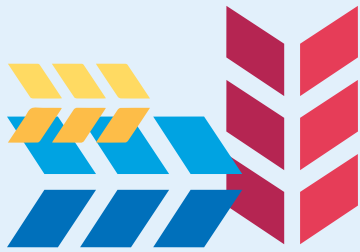
32

CROSS-CULTURAL
MISSIONS

150

NEW MISSION STARTS/
ENHANCEMENTS
SINCE 2011





100 MISSIONS IN 10 YEARS

WELS Home Missions approved **12 new home mission starts and enhancements** in April 2024. That puts us at a total of 15 new starts and 17 enhancements as we work towards our synod's goal of starting 100 missions and enhancing 75 ministries by 2033.

NEW HOME MISSION STARTS



+ Bend, Ore.: Bend was identified in 2020 as the second-fastest growing city in the U.S. A core group of eight families has been gathering twice a month for Bible study and planning as they plant a church in an area where 62 percent of people are not involved with any religious community.

+ Easley, S.C.: Since 2016 Abiding Peace in Simpsonville, S.C., has been exploring the option of starting a second site in the greater Greenville area that includes Easley and Powdersville. Abiding Peace is currently offering worship and Bible study and getting involved in community events from a leased "homebase" in Easley as it evaluates where a future, permanent site might be established with a new missionary.



+ Cedar Lake, Ind.: Members from Trinity and Zion in Crete, Ill., have formed a core group to plant a new mission in nearby Cedar Lake. This area of northwest Indiana is growing rapidly as Chicago commuters look for cheaper alternatives to living in Illinois.



+ Williston, N.D.: The core group in Williston has been gathering for 15 years, now under the name Lamb of God Lutheran Church. It rents a full-time ministry center where members worship weekly online with the WELS church in Bismarck, N.D., and conduct outreach. Members look forward to reaching out with the gospel with their first full-time missionary at the helm.

+ Conway, Ark.: Conway is a growing college town northwest of Little Rock with no WELS presence. A group of 19 WELS members has been gathering at a local hotel on Sundays for worship and Bible study with a part-time retired pastor and getting involved in the community as it prepares to launch a brand-new church.





12

NEW MISSION STARTS/
ENHANCEMENTS
APPROVED IN 2024

Read more about
these new starts
and enhancements
at WELS100IN10.NET.



ENHANCEMENTS

Enhancements at existing congregations could include calling an additional pastor or staff minister, starting a cross-cultural ministry, or restarting a church where members have renewed their efforts to go with the gospel into their community.

- ★ Calvary – Dallas, Tex.
- ★ Crossroads – Chicago, Ill. (Restart)
- ★ Faith – Prior Lake, Minn.
- ★ Good Shepherd – Plymouth, Wis.
- ★ Northdale – Tampa, Fla.
- ★ St. Marcus – Milwaukee, Wis.
- ★ St. Paul – Calgary, AB, Canada

100 MISSIONS IN 10 YEARS

WELS HOME MISSIONS 2023-2033

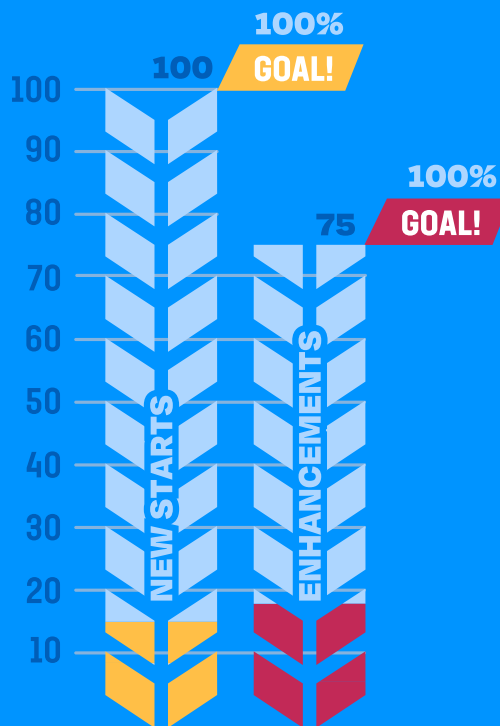
GOAL = 100 new starts +
75 enhancements

15 new
mission starts
since 2023

15%

17 mission
enhancements
since 2023

23%



Faces of Faith – Paul and Carmen

Paul and Carmen are my neighbors and quickly becoming our friends. One morning, on a walk with our kids, we met Paul and his wife, Carmen, on their front lawn. They welcomed us to the city and asked, “What brought you to Marquette?” We responded, “We moved here to start a church.” His reaction was priceless. The Folgers coffee can in Paul’s hand was thrown to the ground in excitement, **“You have no idea how hard we’ve been praying to find a church home! Are you going to be a church that brings us Jesus every Sunday?”** I responded, “You can count on it.” Since that time, they have joined our core

group and are actively participating in the ministry leading up to our launch. God is moving, there’s no doubt about it. How many other Pauls and Carmens are there in Marquette? We can’t wait to find out.



FROM JOSEPH LINDLOFF,
home missionary at
Anchor Church in Marquette, Mich.

Faces of Faith – Steve and Tammy

Back in 2017, I did some door-to-door canvassing in a neighborhood near my house. I met Steve and Tammy who told me that they were looking for a church. I added them to our prospect list and kept in touch through monthly mailings and invitations to our church, but I never saw or heard from them after that. Six years went by before Steve and Tammy finally decided to attend. When I met them in our parking lot, they said,

“You’ve been sending us mailings and invitations every month for the past six years, so we finally decided we wanted to take you up on your offer and attend your church.” By God’s grace, Steve and Tammy have not stopped attending The Vine since. In fact, I had the privilege of baptizing both Steve and Tammy during one of our Sunday services in 2023. And, several months later, they joined us as fellow members of The Vine. Praise God for the means of grace and for giving our congregation the opportunity to be a blessing to them as they are to us.



FROM KEVIN SCHULTZ, home missionary at
The Vine in Hayden, Idaho

Faces of Faith – Brandi

On Easter Sunday 2024, several local families brought their children to the waters of Baptism. One woman, Brandi, brought her two sons, Ryan and Ryley. Brandi has been working her way through Bible basics class in preparation for her adult confirmation. Here is what she says about our church: **“Intown is not just a church; it’s a home for us—with family, unconditional love, and spiritual healing. It’s our safe place when we don’t know where to go. It’s like a life coach who never lets us feel alone. To sum it all up, it’s life, growth, and creation for the better.”**

Our connection with Brandi and her family began at a community service event called the Christmas Store. Their family is an example of how compassion ministry and providing physical aid can create loving relationships, which ultimately lead to deep spiritual growth.



WRITTEN BY LUCAS BITTER, home missionary at
Intown in Atlanta, Ga.



Good News
dedicated their new
church building in
February 2023.



GIVE A GIFT to support WELS Home Missions by scanning the QR code with your phone or visiting wels.net/hmgift.



Faces of Faith - Ruth

Nearly ten years have passed since an e-mail showed up in my inbox. At the time, I was deliberating a call to a new mission in Mt. Horeb, Wis. The e-mail was from a WELS member who had family connections in Mt. Horeb and was delighted to hear about the new WELS mission opening in town. Her son's mother-in-law, Ruth, was described as "a young 84, with a magnetic personality." She hoped that if I took the call to Mt. Horeb, I would be able to connect and share the gospel with her.

For the past ten years, God has been busy: I accepted the call to Good News in Mt. Horeb. I looked up Ruth and quickly found out that the description I had been given of her was spot on. She had a young, magnetic

personality—along with a little East-coast stubbornness. As a result, it took three years of conversations before she became a member of our church.

During Ruth's time at Good News, God used her magnetic personality to connect with even more people. There are now three families who belong to our church and another that attends regularly that can all be traced back to Ruth. I'm certain God will continue to use the connections made through Ruth to bring people to Good News and to the good news of Jesus Christ.

FROM JONATHAN BAUER, home missionary at Good News in Mt. Horeb, Wis.

Faces of Faith – Bill



“I’ve never heard that before.” That’s what Bill said after he attended worship the day his six-year-old grandson was baptized. “That” was a line that the pastor said, **“Jesus died for all sins.”**

Bill grew up attending Catholic schools, so he had some knowledge of the Bible. A section of God’s Word that he knew very well was what God said about divorce. So, when Bill got divorced over 20 years ago, he thought he was doomed. For 20-plus years Bill had been carrying around

guilt and fear. But on that Sunday, he heard, “Jesus paid for all sins.” Did that mean Jesus had paid for the sin of his divorce? Bill left his business card with me on his way out of church, saying, “Let’s do lunch.”

After numerous lunches and a few coffee meetings, Bill enrolled in our Bible information class. The first words he said were, “I know I’m going to hell, but. . . I have some questions.” By God’s grace and the power of the Word, Bill no longer thinks he’s going to hell. Now, he cherishes free forgiveness and that Jesus died for all sins, even his.

FROM JOEL HECKENDORF, home missionary at Light of the Valleys in Reno, Nev.

Faces of Faith – Bruce and Sheryll

Northwest Wisconsin is known for its vast resources for hunting and fishing. The members at Our Redeemer in Ladysmith hosted an outreach event and decided to combine two things they do well, cooking wild game and being friendly. One couple in the congregation had befriended their neighbors, Bruce and Sheryll, and invited them to the annual wild game dinner. Not only did they enjoy a great meal of bear, venison, rabbit, elk, fish, and more, but they were also welcomed with open arms by the members. Before leaving they received an invitation to come back for worship, and they came. They saw the same welcoming congregation at worship and never stopped coming. After

going through a Bible information class, they knew Our Redeemer was their church family. **Two people loving Jesus, hearing the Word, and enjoying the fellowship of a new church family; all because they were invited for supper.**



FROM CHRISTIAN CHRISTENSON, home missionary at Our Redeemer in Ladysmith, Wis.

Faces of Faith – Paulo and Flavia



Paulo and Flavia moved to Canada from Brazil about seven years ago. They originally moved to the Niagara Falls area but settled in Mississauga for work. When they moved, they were in search of a Lutheran church. Having attended some other Lutheran churches, they loved what they found at Cross of Life. They noticed our love for Scripture and our emphasis on outreach and discipleship and gladly became part of our family. Though we have been able to bless them with a church family, they also

have blessed us immensely. Their family gladly serves and supports our ministry. Paulo, Flavia, and their son, Lucas, are all involved with our music team and are active in welcoming new people to our congregation. They encourage and support me, my wife, and our daughters, who are “best friends” and “sisters” in a way only three and four-year-old girls can be. **We would not have this wonderful family who adds so much value to our church if it weren’t for Home Missions supporting churches in Toronto.**

FROM CALEB SCHULTZ, home missionary at Cross of Life in Mississauga, Ont., Canada

Faces of Faith – Jacob and Abby



Jacob and Abby Hicks were just dating when we first met them. Abby would occasionally come to church with her parents who had just become members a year prior. After visiting a couple times with Jacob, they agreed to take Bible information class. We found out Jacob had never been baptized and by the seventh lesson he wanted to be. **We baptized Jacob, confirmed both Jacob and Abby, and later performed their wedding at Cross of Glory.** Last November we welcomed their firstborn, Benjamin, baptizing him into the family of God. They continue to be a large part of Cross of Glory and are always excited to hear more of the Word and grow in their relationship with God.

FROM ANDREW SCHRIMPF,
home missionary at Cross of Glory in Baton Rouge, La.

Faces of Faith – Grenada

Cassia is in grade five at Grace Lutheran School. Her parents are not believers, and up until recently, Cassia was not baptized. Brianna, a classmate, is baptized and lives with her grandmother who is not a believer. Samantha, another classmate, is baptized and her parents are believers. **These three young ladies are Grenadian, the best of friends, from vastly different backgrounds and families, and all three believe that Jesus is their Savior.** Now, we can say they are all born again through Baptism and sealed into God's family.

Cassia was baptized on a Sunday afternoon. As we hiked through the jungle to the major pool of the Seven Sisters Falls, there was laughter and discussion coming from our group. Lucy Bartz and Rachel Ihlenfeldt, two teachers at Grace, and Brianna and Samantha all accompanied Cassia to her Baptism. They had played their God-given roles in planting, watering, and tending to the seed of the gospel as it grew into faith in Cassia, a faith firmly planted in her Savior, Jesus Christ. They escorted her into the pool at the base of the falls and rejoiced as she came out born again into God's ever-growing family.



FROM IB MEYER, retired home missionary at Grace in Grand Anse, Saint George, Grenada

Faces of Faith – Joann



Fairview Lutheran Church tried a new way to connect to its school families. Everything was ready, but when the event began, only current church members were there. Five minutes after the event started, evangelism began. Three minivans with over 20 school family members emptied and overfilled the bingo space. Fairview members quickly set up more tables, distributed snacks, and sat with families to assist some of the younger students who had never played bingo. It was busy, loud, and a bit chaotic. It was also blessed.

One of the school moms, Joann, stayed after the event with her six children, cleaned up the area, and made connections with some of the church ladies. They

invited her to come to Fairview's outdoor worship and picnic the following weekend. Joann and her family not only came to worship but found her way into helping serve the main course and clean up after. Before leaving she scheduled her first Bible information class for the upcoming Tuesday.

Despite having a car out of commission, Joann and family have been coming to worship and sitting up front ever since. **The entire family was baptized, and the middle school children are enrolled in youth confirmation class.** Joann has recently agreed to be trained and begin making evangelism calls to her fellow school families.

FROM PAUL STEINBERG, home missionary at Fairview in Milwaukee, Wis.



WELS Church Extension Fund
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Where investing in your future builds churches



Thank you, WELS Church Extension Fund, for supporting the planting of new home mission churches!

- **\$44.57 million** in matching land and facility grants to home mission congregations since 1993
- **\$226.89 million** in loans approved since fiscal year 2017
- **\$15.34 million** in grants to WELS Home Missions to help fund mission operations since 2010

Learn how you can invest with WELS Church Extension Fund and simultaneously support Home Missions at wels.net/cef.

The purchase of WELS CEF securities is subject to risks, which are described in our Offering Circular. The selected financial information above should be viewed in conjunction with our audited financial statements contained in the Offering Circular. The WELS CEF Offering Circular can be found online at wels.net/offering-circular. This is not an offer to sell, nor the solicitation to buy, our securities. We will offer and sell our securities only in states where authorized. WELS CEF certificates are unsecured general debt obligations. WELS CEF is not a bank or regulated financial institution. This offering is made solely by the Offering Circular. Not FDIC or SIPC insured • Not a bank deposit • No WELS guarantee



CAMPUS MINISTRY

WELS Campus Ministry, a ministry of WELS Home Missions, provides resources, support, and encouragement to WELS congregations that serve college students. These congregations are vital in connecting college students with fellow Christians, strengthening their faith with the gospel, and encouraging them to share that faith with other college students.

Faces of Faith – Drake

What comes to mind when people think of NCAA Division I athletics? Dedication, drive, determination, devotion, competition, and so much more. One thing noticeably absent is any reference to faith or a relationship with Christ. I

suppose that is not surprising given the culture of universities. But Drake Andrews, a freshman at Ohio State University (OSU) and a D1 men's gymnastics competitor is seeking to change that. While Drake was working hard academically and physically during his first semester at OSU,

he felt like something was missing. After being encouraged by close friends to seek out a church, Drake found his way to St. Paul's, and the Holy Spirit ignited a flame of faith that has only gotten brighter. In Drake's own words, **"I knew from the first service I attended that I had found my new home.**" I am extremely excited to be confirmed. This is one of the most important aspects of my life, and I am thankful for the gifts that God has provided me with: a loving and supportive family, friends, the ability to train and compete in the sport I love, and most of all, the ability to serve him while here on earth." Drake was confirmed and welcomed into membership on March 10, 2024, and I am excited to see his faith and passion for Christ grow in the years to come.

FROM ROSS COTTSCALK, campus ministry pastor at St. Paul's in Columbus, Ohio

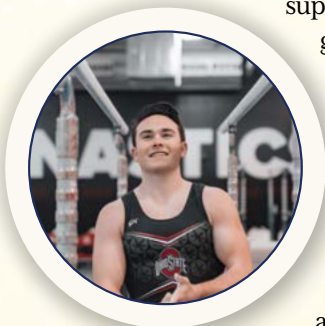
Faces of Faith – Katelyn and Hali

Starting college at Coastal Carolina University in 2021 was a challenging time for Katelyn and me. We both grew up in WELS congregations, and we struggled to adjust to an environment that pushed values and beliefs that we did not share. There were many moments when we felt alone on campus.

The family and support we found at church was what encouraged us during difficult times and reminded us of the comfort we could find in God and our church family. Our freshman year was the first year that there was a steady group of college students who attended Amazing Grace in Myrtle Beach, S.C. We began having dinners at Katelyn's house as a small escape from the pressures of Coastal, with friends who we knew shared the same faith. After a few dinners, our vicar at the time approached us with the idea of starting a Campus Ministry program as an outlet to strengthen our faith and enjoy fellowship. We were all very excited to start!

We began meeting for Bible studies twice a month and have continued for the past three years. There are still only five or six of us who attend, but as Matthew 18:20 says, **"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."** We find comfort in this promise and are grateful for the time we get to spend in God's Word and for the support of our Campus Ministry family on campus.

FROM KATELYN BAKER AND HALI TAINATONGO, campus ministry students at Coastal Carolina University





JOINT Missions

WELS Joint Missions supports mission opportunities that are the responsibility of Home Missions, World Missions, and Ministerial Education. Much of this work centers around diaspora (people-group) ministries, where immigrants who have joined our fellowship in the United States and Canada are able to take the gospel back to friends and family in their country of origin. Joint Missions administers the work of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) and assists in other cross-cultural outreach efforts and programs like WELS Mission Journeys. The Joint Mission Council has identified people from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Cuba, India, Korea, Liberia, Mexico, Pakistan, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Vietnam, and other countries who have interest in training to take the gospel to their own people groups in the United States and in their countries of origin.

Faces of Faith – Kim Nga

I arrived in Garden Grove, Calif., in the summer of 2023 to begin Vietnamese ministry at King of Kings. One of the places I often visit is the Chapman Care Center. On one of my visits I met Uncle Minh, a Vietnamese man. His wife, Kim Nga, had been in the hospital for a while.



Years ago, Uncle Minh had gone back to Vietnam to marry Kim Nga and bring her back to the U.S. A few years later, they discovered she had a brain tumor that required removing almost half of her brain.

Now she can't walk, and she must stay in bed and receive special care. I heard their story and asked for his permission to

visit his wife and pray for her. After pray-

ing with Kim Nga, I continued to come back and share Jesus with her, explaining God's love to her. She was quiet and attentive, and in December 2023, I asked her if she wanted to be a child of God. **She replied that she did and asked what she should do to become one.**

FAST FACTS

- There are 72 locations across the U.S. and Canada reaching out to different people groups in their communities. Learn more on the interactive map found at wels.net/jointmissions.
- King of Kings in Garden Grove, Calif., serves as the host for ministry in three different languages: English, Vietnamese, and Spanish through Pan De Vida Iglesia Luterana.

Later, I called Uncle Minh to discuss Baptism. He shared that he asked a Vietnamese pastor to visit and baptize his wife, but that pastor was unavailable. I offered to complete the baptism for her, and he agreed. Within two hours, I had prepared water and a baptismal certificate. On Dec. 12, 2023, I baptized Kim Nga and one more soul was recorded in the book of heaven.

FROM TRUNG LE, missionary at King of Kings in Garden Grove, Calif.



PASTORAL STUDIES INSTITUTE

The Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI), a partnership between WELS Joint Missions and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, provides pre-seminary and seminary training to North American students from a variety of countries and cultures. PSI also consults with regional World Missions teams and sister churches around the world on their theological education programs and coordinates advance degree programs and visiting instructors upon request.

Faces of Faith - Daniel

My name is Daniel, and I was born and raised in East Asia. I attended St. Croix Lutheran Academy in St. Paul, Minn., for high school and then was accepted at Colby College. I am currently studying Computer Science, Statistics, and Mathematics. While the courses are intellectually challenging, I was still looking to continue my spiritual education. My studies at Colby enable me to make a living, but my studies with PSI give me a purpose and life as I

learn God's Word and prepare to share the good news of Jesus with others. I even found an opportunity to explain the great exchange on the cross to my Chinese friends at a statistics tournament! I would not have been able to do so without training through PSI.

As I prepare to enter society fully, I often feel anxious that I do not know enough about life and that I am not smart or virtuous enough to face its challenges. **It really comforts me that God's wisdom is always by my side.**

The modern world is full of temptations, chaos, and sin, and it made me confused and resentful, while at the same time, I am arrogant and sinful from within. God's Word is like music to my ears and medicine to my soul. It is what gives me direction, courage, and wisdom in life.

I hope to continue growing intellectually, morally, and spiritually through my college and PSI education. I pray that by God's guidance, I can become someone who lives by faith, and my knowledge can be used in God's kingdom.



FAST FACTS

- PSI currently trains 32 students from **11 different people groups** in 21 locations throughout North America.
- PSI's **Joshua Urban Ministry Program (JUMP)** in Milwaukee, Wis., currently trains eight inner-city men for the pastoral ministry.
- **Five Chinese PSI students** joined the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary student body in January 2024 for an intensive one-week study of two specialized courses.

LEARN MORE about WELS Joint Missions at wels.net/jointmissions.

MISSION JOURNEYS

WELS Mission Journeys provides an opportunity for all WELS members to walk together in the Great Commission. Short- or long-term service opportunities in WELS mission fields at home and abroad will prayerfully inspire a lifelong journey of service for all who volunteer. Ascension in Harrisburg, Penn., sent a Mission Journeys team to volunteer at Living Savior, a home mission congregation in Hendersonville, N.C. Hear from a couple of their team members:

Faces of Faith - Jake

Our church, Ascension in Harrisburg, Penn., was deemed a home mission restart in 2019. The Lord has blessed our church immensely since then, and we couldn't think of a better way to share our joy in his blessings than by sharing ourselves as blessings to another church in need, as many had done for us!



Mission trips are an incredible way to live the Great Commission. As we shared the Good News with many people of Huntersville, N.C., the Lord found ways to work even more through our trip. He drew our team of five volunteers tighter together, strengthened our bond, and sharpened our outreach skills as we returned to reach out to our local community. We found fellowship within our group and within the greater body of believers as we connected with many members of Living Savior. **These mission trips open you up for God to bless you in ways you never imagined!**

Faces of Faith - Gary

I'm Gary Piatkowski, and I'm a member at Ascension in Harrisburg, Pa. **It's so exciting to share the Good News of salvation on a Mission Journey trip.** I was overwhelmed with the outpouring of love and generosity to spread the gospel amongst the unchurched. With the Holy Spirit guiding us, we let people know how life-changing his word can be. Mission Journeys give you the opportunity to change lives, just as our lives have been changed, in Christ.



Faces of Faith - Michelle

Our Mission Journeys team helped Living Savior go door-to-door in neighborhoods nearby to spread the word about their upcoming youth sports camp. At first, I was nervous and slightly hesitant to participate, as I am more introverted and was only confirmed in WELS less than two months prior. My attitude changed quickly. I really enjoyed the opportunity to go door-to-door in a new community to not only promote the sports camp, but to also shine Christ's light and love to strangers. The congregation was very appreciative of the work we completed while we were with them. **They were so welcoming and kind, and it was wonderful to experience and interact with a WELS community outside of our own!**



Mission trips through WELS Mission Journeys are open to all ages and backgrounds with a heart for mission work! Learn more and apply today at wels.net/missionjourneys.

Legacy of Faith – Lorenz and Margaret



Lorenz Rusert was a hardworking, practical man. He was always willing to help others who were in need. He was humble, generous, and a wonderful example of Christian love.

Whether it was someone studying to be a pastor or teacher who needed help with tuition, or a local congregation or school that had a building project, or a desire to support WELS mission work, Lorenz was the guy who would help. His love for his Savior was obvious.

His passion for mission work went back to when the family moved to Minnesota. The first Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) national convention was held at their home church and Lorenz's wife Margaret was a founding member of that first action team. The family still holds a deep love for LWMS and enjoys going to the annual convention where they meet all kinds of people and learn about mission work happening all over the United States and around the world. That love for mission work led to gifts that support a variety of WELS ministries such as Home Missions and the 100 Missions in 10 Years initiative, World Missions, the education center in Vietnam, Mission Journeys, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary scholarships, and more.

Lorenz thought about what his money could do after he was in Heaven and talked about it with his sons. He understood the importance of legacy gifts. Son Jerry encourages, **“So many people are uncomfortable and don't want to talk about what happens with their money when they die.”** But working with their dad while he was alive helped the sons ask great questions and understand his wishes; his intentions were very clear. They set up the trust following his

desires and now sons Roger and Jerry, along with their wives, manage the family trust. They take out a certain percentage each year and give it to the church to help spread the gospel in local communities and around the globe. **“He will always be an amazing man in our eyes and in our hearts; he had such foresight for mission work for his whole life,”** says daughter-in-law Judy.



Lorenz and Margaret's sons, Roger and Jerry, along with their wives

Lorenz was a living example of how to serve God and share the love of Jesus through WELS mission work. His family continues to serve the church in many ways. They put their faith in action and share these earthly blessings entrusted to them. Now Lorenz's legacy of giving lives on through his children. The family encourages others to think about how they could use their earthly blessings and put a plan in place. Consider what your legacy of faith could accomplish. **“What good can you do with your money? What better than bringing someone to God,”** says son Roger.

What better than bringing someone to God,” says son Roger.

To learn more about leaving a legacy of faith to support mission work in a way that works for you and your family, explore the many options offered through WELS Foundation or WELS Church Extension Fund at wels.net/give.

WORLD



DEAR FRIENDS OF MISSIONS,

Faithful witnesses of the past have shared the gift of life with you, and through the faith God created in your heart, you have eternal life in heaven. “These [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). You also now share in the amazing ministry of passing on eternal life to others. And this world needs it!

WELS World Missions conducts and encourages gospel outreach in 46 foreign countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 19 prospective new mission fields. World Missions brings the light of God’s Word through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials in foreign languages. More than 300,000 people outside of North America gather in mission settings, sister church bodies, and early church plants to be served by the means of grace. The advance of technology has allowed us to reach out with the gospel into places that

were before unreachable. It is humbling to partner with so many faithful witnesses who work in settings where the darkness of death leads to dangers and trials that are much different than the ones we face in North America. We have so many stories to share and not enough space to tell them all. We pray that this magazine gives you a glimpse into some of the many lives that are being changed for eternity.

Please pray for these fellow believers. Your gifts have allowed us to plant God’s Word in far corners of the globe – and these words change everything. While we wait for our Lord’s return, we have this work before us. We who have life are the witnesses God uses to bring this life to others. Thank you for all you do to share this truth with the nations!

Your servant in Christ,

PASTOR LARRY SCHLOMER,
World Missions administrator

PARTNERING WITH
OVER
500
NATIONAL
PASTORS

GOSPEL
OUTREACH IN
46
FOREIGN
COUNTRIES

19
PROSPECTIVE
NEW MISSION
FIELDS





WORLD Missions

WORLD MISSIONS SUPPORTS MISSION WORK:

- on **Native American reservations**, where the gospel is being shared on the Apache reservations in Arizona, and the Native Christian Network has begun outreach to additional tribes;
- in **Africa**, where missionaries partner with national church bodies in seven countries and are exploring outreach and following up with TELL contacts in 16 more countries throughout the continent;
- in **Asia**, where 17 missionaries have joined together to equip, encourage, and empower others to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to 1.8 billion unreached souls;
- in **Latin America**, where hundreds of thousands of people are being reached through *Academia Cristo* online courses and more than 30 individuals are actively leading a group in worship and study;
- in **Europe**, where missionaries partner with national churches to train the next generation of church leaders and bring the true gospel to countries without a strong Lutheran presence;
- and through **Multi-Language Productions**, which has produced materials in more than 56 languages and reaches tens of thousands of English-speakers in more than 30 different countries through the TELL online training platform.

47

WORLD
MISSIONARIES



TRAINING
MORE THAN

400

SEMINARY
STUDENTS



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ASIA

The Asia One Team comprises 17 missionaries serving 18 different countries throughout Asia. The team, largely based in Thailand and Hong Kong, partners with God's people to equip, encourage, and empower others to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to 1.8 billion unreached souls throughout Asia. Asia Lutheran Seminary continues to provide theological education across the continent.

Faces of Faith - Li

Pastor Li's non-Christian wife tried to get him to understand how embarrassing it was to tell coworkers that her husband was a pastor. She was ashamed of him and ashamed to be his wife. He listened to

her complaints, and he continued to pray for her. He highlighted God's blessings for her whenever there was an opportunity, helped her run her noodle shop, and he took regular walks with her.

Eventually she began to ask for his prayers. Eventually she

told him that she was also praying. Eventually she asked to be baptized.

Now, as a child of God, she looks forward to their weekly worship gathering and communing with brothers and sisters in Christ.

She sings in the choir. And, she and Pastor Li pray together that the Holy Spirit would lead their son to faith.



FROM MATT DOEBLER, *Asia One Team* missionary

PHOTO | iStock

FAST FACTS

- The Asia One Team is exploring outreach opportunities in **Myanmar, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates.**
- **Asia Lutheran Seminary** is integrating with TELL Network to serve English-speaking students in Asia.
- Asia Lutheran Seminary is serving **104 students** in its degree program and more than **300 students** through its Regional Theological Education Program.
- There were more than **9,000 baptisms** across Asia in 2023. More than half of those were adults.
- There are now **85 groups** gathering in East Asia, up from 55 in 2020.
- There are 67 groups serving **4,000 people** in Bangladesh; 70 people were confirmed in one month.
- The **Hmong Fellowship Church** now serves around 145,000 members in Vietnam. 120 leaders are receiving seminary training, and 1,400 are being served with local training in the rural areas.

Faces of Faith - Joe

Killing a pig is one reason for feasting in Village 9. It is even more an opportunity to share the gospel. Pastor Joe, one of our local Lutheran pastors in Thailand, recently did exactly that. When he decided to slaughter his pig, he obviously had to invite everyone in the village to share in the feast. In fact, not sharing the feast would have cut him off from his community.



Much of the community is not Christian. Many of them have no interest in coming to church. Many of them are not interested in hearing the gospel. Yet Pastor Joe used this feast as an opportunity to show hospitality, Christ's love, and the light of the gospel to the community around him. He used it to not

only show how God has blessed him with a pig to slaughter, but a Savior who was slaughtered for their sins. He used it not only to let them feast on the pig, but to feast on God's Word. **He used it as an opportunity for his community to hear about the greater community connected to our loving God.** Please continue to pray for our pastors in Thailand as they continue to leverage community events to share the gospel with their neighbors!

FROM MARK ZONDAG, Asia One Team missionary

Faces of Faith - Chong

I have known Chong for the last ten years. When we first met, he was a young high schooler. Every time I visited East Asia, he never missed any of my training sessions. Sadly, it has been extremely difficult to do face-to-face training for the Miao leaders in East Asia lately. Many of the church's leaders are disappearing from the community, and nobody knows their fate.



Despite all this, Chong continues to hold onto his faith and never ceases to learn the Word of God. Chong also continues to gather a small group of young leaders to continue to serve their congregations. In their hearts, they know that they will be facing the power of the Devil, but through their faith in Jesus Christ, they continue to fight the good fight. Chong said, **"They can only kill my body but not my soul. I am ready at any time to serve my Lord and his people."** Chong asks all of you to continue to pray for him, his family, and his co-workers in Christ. He and his co-workers are eager to receive face-to-face training and pray that the door for the gospel will be opened wider to the Miao and other minorities in East Asia. May the Lord of the church send more workers to harvest his fields!

FROM AN ASIA ONE TEAM MISSIONARY

PHOTO | iStock

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EUROPE

The Europe mission team partners to share Christ's grace in Albania, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Russia, and Ukraine while supporting sister church bodies in seven additional European countries. There are three WELS missionaries residing in Europe.

Faces of Faith – Dora

As we look around the space that we might rent for weekly services in central London, Dora Correa turns and gives a decisive nod. “Don’t worry, pastor,” she says, “Some fresh flowers, some new curtains. This place can be a home for us.”

Dora is a living example of the ripple effect of the gospel. Her mother worked in the house of WELS Missionary Larry Schlomer, Sr. in Colombia, and she heard the gospel message from him. She preached the message to her children, and the whole family became Lutherans. Since then, Dora has moved internationally twice, first from Colombia to Spain, and then from Spain to England. Now, she lives in London with her sister, Marta, and various members of their extended family, including her son and grandson. The family connected with Lutherans in London when Missionary Mike Hartman reached out to arrange a visit. Dora and Marta attend as many worship services in London as possible. Although there is a language barrier between them and most other members of the group, Dora says they feel at home among their fellow Lutherans, especially when they take Holy Communion together.



Dora is familiar with settling into new homes. She knows from experience the things that are most important to take with you when you move. It’s not the curtains, books, or trinkets that matter—**the Word of God and sacraments with fellow Christians are the things that are irreplaceable.**

FROM RUTH NITZ, world missionary wife in London, England

FAST FACTS

- **Germany and the United Kingdom** rank among the top five countries of the world to welcome new immigrants. In 2023, each country reported a net migration of about 700,000 people.
- More than 45 WELS members are volunteering in **London** in the summer of 2024 to assist the launch of a new church.
- The **three missionaries in Europe** settled into their new fields within three days of each other in May 2023.
- WELS’ sister church, the **Lutheran Confessional Church – Sweden**, celebrates its 50th anniversary in July 2024. Seven Swedish pastors serve 220 baptized members in seven congregations. Two men are preparing for ministry.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Europe mission team has partnered with WELS Mission Journeys to establish a volunteer program for short- and long-term volunteers in London. Learn more and apply at wels.net/missionjourneys.



Colombia

LATIN AMERICA

The Latin America mission team uses *Academia Cristo*, an online outreach and training tool, to share God's grace with as many people as possible as well as identify and train potential leaders who can plant churches. Currently there are 10 missionaries serving on the Latin America mission team.

Faces of Faith – Javier



Would you change jobs so that you could start a Bible study group?

That's what Javier Rivas from Buenaventura, Colombia, did. He started studying with *Academia Cristo* in September 2022. He quickly moved through the *Academia Cristo* discipleship program. He loved what he was learning and wanted

to share it with others. But he worked

at a resort about an hour boat ride away. Work would often keep him away from his city for weeks. When he learned more about how he could plant his own church, he decided to look for work in his home city. He knew that being away from home for extended periods of time would limit his

potential to plant and lead a group, and being based in his city would give him opportunities to invite, gather, and teach.

Motivated by his love for the gospel, he left his job and looked for a new one in Buenaventura and started gathering a group. First, he shared a course called "The Four Key Concepts" that covers the topics of sin, grace, faith, and works. Then he taught a course called "Learn from me," a Bible information course. **Today, he continues to gather his friends, family, and neighbors around God's Word.**

Javier has been blessed with employment in his city. However, he has also become a blessing to others as he shares with them the message of salvation through Jesus.

FROM MATT BEHMER, Latin America missionary

FAST FACTS

- 2 million-plus average weekly reach on social media.
- 3,000-plus students from 27 countries have completed the self-study level of courses since 2020.
- An average of 50+ students finish the self-study level courses each week.
- 840 students from 22 countries have completed at least one live course with a missionary or national partner since 2020.

Faces of Faith - Alejandro

WELS has been doing mission work in Puerto Rico for more than half a century, but *Academia Cristo* efforts in Puerto Rico are only just beginning. Alejandro Hernandez began his *Academia Cristo* studies in summer 2023 and moved through the program in record time. As he took live courses with *Academia Cristo* professors, he filled every night of the week with *Academia Cristo* classes.

These courses, and the work of the Holy Spirit in Alejandro's heart, have brought about a quick succession of events. From January-March 2024, Alejandro finished the entire first level of the *Academia Cristo* live course work (over 100 hours of time) and completed a one-on-one study of 95 points of doctrine with an *Academia*

Cristo professor, which led him to confess complete doctrinal agreement with what was taught. Now, Alejandro has taken the first steps toward gathering a group of friends and family around the Word of God using provided Lutheran materials.

Only God knows what is next for this work, but when Alejandro was recently visited by missionaries for the first time, in no uncertain terms, he expressed a desire to work toward **planting a church**

in his community. And, if early results are any indicator, Alejandro is not going to waste any time getting started.

FROM ANDREW JOHNSTON, Latin America missionary



FAST FACTS

- **95 students** have completed Discipleship One, a series of 13 live courses, since 2020.
- **35 students** have completed Discipleship Two, a series of eight advanced live courses, since 2020.
- **34 church plants (Grupos Sembrador)** have been started by *Academia Cristo* students since 2020.



34

ACTIVE CHURCH
PLANTS

Faces of Faith - Cesar

Academia Cristo has advanced and changed during the last several years. Technology has changed, curriculum was expanded and revised, new resources for church planters have been introduced. One student who has been with *Academia Cristo* through it all is Cesar Augusto Narvaez.

When *Academia Cristo* was just experimenting with live classes, Cesar enrolled. Since 2020, he has completed 16 live courses. He was equipped to gather and lead his own church plant that now meets every week for worship and Bible study. They reach out to their friends, family, and neighbors, and are training members so they can participate in ministry as well. Missionaries from the Latin America mission team regularly make visits to Cesar and his group. On one visit, a missionary asked all the members what prompted them to attend for the first time. Everyone had the same answer, "Cesar invited me."

Some aspects of mission work may change over time, but some things remain constant. First, the power of the gospel.

It's the good news of Jesus that leads people like Cesar to share their faith.

It's the message of God's grace, love, and redemption that keep people coming back. Second, the power of a simple invitation. Today, more people are learning about their Savior and growing in their faith because of a simple invitation from someone they knew.

FROM MATT BEHMER, Latin America missionary



MULTI-LANGUAGE PRODUCTIONS

Multi-Language Productions (MLP) has created more than 2.9 million video, audio, and print resources in 56 languages for use in global outreach. They also operate the TELL Network, an online training and church multiplication program offered in English, Mandarin, Spanish, and Tagalog. Working closely with WELS world missionary teams, TELL Network provides Bible study curriculum focused on leadership training for students across the globe, preparing them to gather groups, lead Bible studies, and plant churches.

Faces of Faith – Opiew

I'm Opiew Okugn Adiew from Gambela, Ethiopia. I was raised in a Christian home. My parents were faithful believers and instilled a love for Christ in me, but by the time I was 30 years old, I began reading Scripture more critically and openly questioning some of the doctrines I was taught. I became dissatisfied with false teachings among my church and many churches in my community. My concerns became large enough that a few friends and I decided to start our own church based solely on Scripture. One of my friends had a little theological education, but we all desired more training. I contacted WELS and was directed to the One Africa Team, which got me connected with TELL. Fast forward to today, and I have become a more confident church leader. **When you share the gospel, you need to understand the grace of God. That is what I understand from the TELL program because they understand the Bible well.**

I shepherd a congregation, leading worship and Bible study. I share the TELL method of training with other pastors, teachers, and lay workers in the local dialect but continue studying with TELL in English. If you want to become a strong preacher, you need to use the TELL program. . . to *think, evaluate, and learn* the Scripture, and finally to *lead* a church to understand the Scripture. You can establish friendships with many pastors around the world!

500+
STUDENTS
TRAINING TO PLANT
CHURCHES



FAST FACTS

- There are more than **500 active TELL English students** studying God's Word to become group leaders and church planters.
- More than **35 TELL students are connected to counselors** for ongoing encouragement.
- TELL Mandarin has enrolled more than **1,200 students.**



TELL Network is committed to training and counseling students as they learn truths of the Bible. **“It’s exciting to be a part of helping students grow closer to their Savior through TELL and bring them into doctrinal agreement.”**

DAN KROLL, Africa missionary
(Pictured with Opiew and Gambela church leaders)

NATIVE AMERICAN MISSION

WELS' Native American mission serves nine churches, and two Lutheran elementary schools, and it provides theological education through the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) on the Fort Apache and San Carlos Apache reservations in Arizona. New Native American outreach is also occurring in the Four Corners area of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado through the Native Christians Network. The Native American mission is served by six missionaries, two national pastors, and one national evangelist.

Faces of Faith - Bonnie

Twenty-eight years. That's how long Bonnie Lewis has been teaching! Bonnie is an Apache woman living with her husband, Francis, in Whiteriver, Ariz. She started teaching pre-school in the late '80s, and in 2001 she started teaching at the WELS Lutheran elementary school in East Fork. She's been there ever since.

The love of young children has kept Bonnie coming back year after year. She says, **"I'm privileged to teach the kids Bible stories at our school, and they absolutely love them!"** Bonnie chuckled as she reflected on how former students have asked to come back to kindergarten. Even though they obviously can't return to her beloved classroom, they can, like the Apostle Paul said, "continue in what they have learned." By the power of the Holy Spirit working in their hearts through the Word and sacraments, they will do so. Bonnie finds encouragement in the passage: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

This school year marks a milestone for Bonnie and East Fork Lutheran School as she has announced her retirement. Though retirement is around the corner, Bonnie isn't one to simply do nothing. She has been an active, faithful member of her home congregation, Open Bible Lutheran Church in Whiteriver, and God-willing she hopes to be able to continue doing so.

FROM JOHN HOLTZ, Native Christians Network missionary



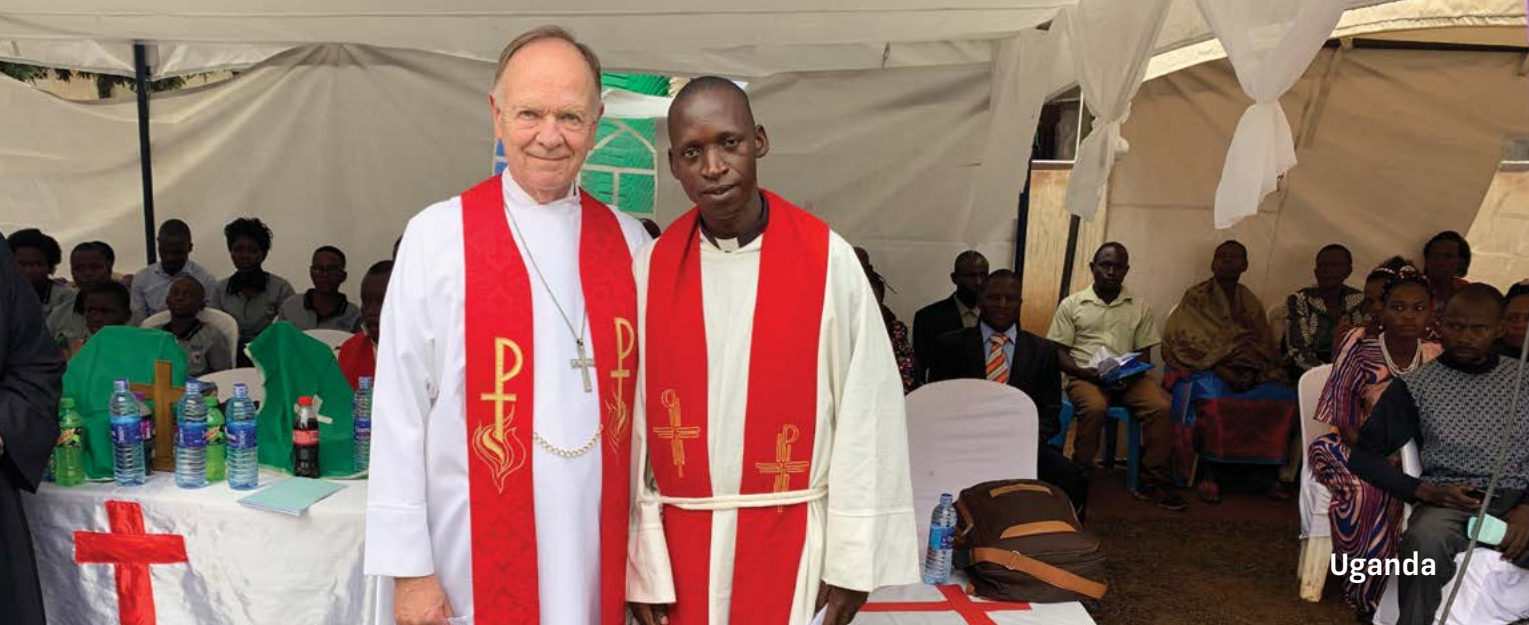
FAST FACTS

- **Rev. Nate Wagenknecht** is the newest missionary for the Native Christians Network. He is beginning outreach to tribes in the Four Corners region, working closely with Apache members who want to reach out to friends and family members from other tribes with the gospel message.
- **Seven Apache lay leaders** are regularly helping with preaching sermons, leading worship services, serving Holy Communion, etc., in local Apache congregations.
- There are more than **250 children currently attending the two WELS Lutheran elementary schools** on the Fort Apache and San Carlos Apache reservations.

574
NATIVE AMERICAN RESERVATIONS THROUGHOUT THE U.S.



Native American outreach in the **Four Corners region** will include developing existing opportunities previously identified through Christ the Rock in Farmington, N.M., and expanding digital outreach efforts.



Uganda

AFRICA

The WELS One Africa Team currently works with established church bodies in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia, partnering in outreach and assisting with theological education programs. The team is also working with groups or exploring outreach and following up on contacts identified through Multi-Language Production's TELL program in 16 additional African countries. Currently, seven missionaries serve on the One Africa Team, and an additional Multi-Language Productions missionary based in Zambia oversees the TELL Africa program.

FAST FACTS

- Two WELS missionaries in Africa have committed themselves to learning **French** and two missionaries are learning **Swahili**; there are plans to call a third French-speaking missionary.
- **30 TELL students** from Africa have completed the first level of live TELL classes.
- The **Confessional Lutheran Institute**, the theological education arm of the One Africa Team, is currently providing a **Bachelor of Divinity degree program (BDiv)** to 17 pastors and a **Master of Theological studies (MTh) program** for 3 pastors in addition to providing professional development and continuing education courses for pastors at all our African sister synods.



The One Africa Team is having doctrinal discussions with a large church body in **Tanzania** and two French-speaking synods, one in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (pictured)** and one in **Cameroon**, as they explore potential fellowship.

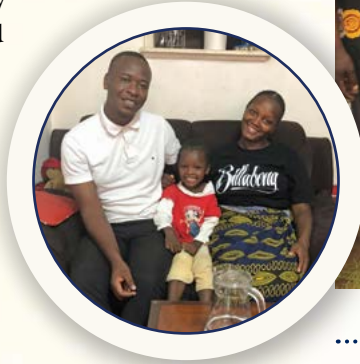
Faces of Faith - Elijah

Elijah Adongo is a TELL student from Nairobi, Kenya. In March 2023, he attended a special TELL event in Nairobi. Some students had studied together online for years, but this was the first time seeing one another in-person. Baptism was the topic for the Bible study.

In Africa, immersion is considered the only valid form of baptism in many churches, and infant Baptism rarely happens. **“This is our belief and practice concerning Baptism because this was the mantle that was passed to us from others.”** That’s the repeating theme I often hear. Gathered around a table and God’s Word, the Holy Spirit lifted that mantle and replaced it with a clear understanding of God’s gift of Baptism.

Two days later, Elijah invited me to his home where he asked if his four-year-old daughter could be baptized. After a devotion and assuring Mikayla that she wasn’t going to be immersed, the angels in heaven rejoiced as another precious child was brought into God’s family through Baptism. By God’s grace, Elijah continues his studies with TELL and shares what he has learned with others.

FROM JOEL HOFF, TELL missionary in Africa



TELL hosted a special workshop in **Uganda** where members of the Obadiah Lutheran Synod, WELS sister church, and TELL students came together to learn about God’s Word.

OUTREACH IN

16

ADDITIONAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Connect WITH WELS MISSIONS



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BLOGS

Read weekly stories from home and world missionaries and receive quarterly Missions news updates in your inbox at wels.net/subscribe.

CENTRAL AFRICA MEDICAL MISSION

The Central Africa Medical Mission (CAMM) oversees the Lutheran Mission Rural Health Centre, a permanent clinic in Zambia, and the Lutheran Mobile Clinic in Malawi, where staff travels to four designated villages for a day of clinical work and care. Both clinics provide Christian counseling and education, HIV testing and treatment, malaria treatment, pediatric wellness checks and immunizations, and treatment of other minor injuries or illnesses. CAMM is also exploring additional opportunities to partner with other African sister synods to offer short-term medical camps in other countries. CAMM is blessed to partner with the Lutheran Church of Central Africa, other sister synods in Africa, and WELS missionaries to serve the spiritual and physical needs of people in Africa.

Faces of Faith – John

John Michoro, a member at Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ-Kenya, strives to bring more people to Jesus by being a shining example of a servant leader. As a son of a Kenyan pastor, John has always had Jesus as part of his life. He dedicated his efforts this past year to bring the Central Africa Medical Mission (CAMM) to Karima, Kenya, as an outreach tool for their church. He worked closely with CAMM, the Kenyan Kirinyaga County government, and the church

to organize the logistics, financials, and communication required for the medical camp in Kenya that was held in February 2024. They served close to 1,500 patients during the four-day camp. With only one percent of the population in the surrounding community professing the Lutheran faith, John has high hopes this clinic has not only served these patients' physical needs but will also be a way to touch their souls by hearing the love of Jesus. The impact of love

and teamwork he has seen during the planning and running of the medical camp solidifies his faith even more. He observed many different groups of varying backgrounds from the community come together and share their love for each other, just as Jesus showed his love for so many. John's face lights up in a huge smile as he talks about his faith and shares it with others!

FROM ANGELA SIEVERT, *Central Africa Medical Mission committee chairwoman*

FAST FACTS

- CAMM worked with WELS' sister synod in Kenya to conduct a **four-day medical camp in Karima, Kenya**, in February 2024. The clinic focused on women's health, wellness screenings, HIV screenings, and mental health consultations.
- The Lutheran Mobile Clinic in Malawi served **53,403 individuals** in 2023, an increase of more than 8,500 patients.
- The cost per patient in Malawi is about **\$0.60**.
- In Zambia, **150 moms welcomed babies** in the newly renovated mother's shelter in 2023.



80,000

PATIENTS SERVED
EVERY YEAR AT
CAMM CLINICS

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Taste of MISSIONS



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