



Faces of FAITH

STORIES FROM WELS MISSIONS



2026/2027

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD





DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIEND,

Every story in *Faces of Faith* points to the same truth: the Lord is at work—often quietly, sometimes unexpectedly—bringing the gospel to people who need it. Behind each face you'll encounter in these pages is someone whose life is being shaped by Christ working through his people.

That has always been at the heart of WELS Home Missions. We plant churches so more people can hear the good news of forgiveness, peace, and hope in Jesus. New mission congregations are gospel outposts—placed where people are, meeting real needs, and sharing the unchanging message of Christ crucified and risen. Through those congregations, Christ is at work through us, reaching into communities we could never reach on our own.

Planting churches takes time and faith. It means stepping forward in trust, confident that Christ is at work through his people even when results aren't immediately visible.

Day by day, the gospel is shared, relationships are built, and the Spirit works through his Word. Again and again, the Lord blesses that patient, faithful work, using ordinary congregations and ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. The faces you'll encounter in these pages are a glimpse of that fruit and a reminder that when Christ works through us, lives are changed.

As you turn these pages, I pray you see more than individual stories. I pray you see a shared mission—congregations, missionaries, and supporters working together so that more people may know Jesus. Thank you for your prayers, your generosity, and your partnership in the gospel.

Because when Christ works through us, lives are changed—now and for eternity.

In Christ,

PASTOR MARK GABB,
Home Missions administrator



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HOME MISSION
CONGREGATIONS

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WELS Home Missions plants new churches and assists mission-minded congregations across North America. Home Missions currently supports more than 150 congregations with financial subsidy or district mission board/mission counselor assistance, with 28 of those being cross-cultural mission congregations. Home Missions also provides nearly 50 campus ministries with financial support while assisting hundreds of other congregations that serve college students around the United States and Canada.

Faces of Faith—Marisol and Esteban

Amazing Grace celebrated a baby the evening we first met Marisol and Esteban. They had received a postcard from Amazing Grace and found their way to our church rental for Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship. We gathered that night to worship the little baby who came to save us from our sins. But God's Word would bring even more peace and joy that Christmas night. There was another baby in the room. Marisol quietly shared that she was expecting. This little girl would change their lives. And through this baby, too, God would show us again what he promises and what he does for all people.

Little did anyone else know that the doctors had told the couple that their baby, due soon, would not survive due to a rare genetic disorder. Yet Marisol and Esteban clung to the life God had given them, and God was already working despite the coming tragedy.

When we were able to sit down together, Marisol and Esteban had plenty of doubts, worry, anxiety, and questions. But God would wash that little baby's sins away. We shared the comfort of God's Word, the promise of forgiveness, and the gift of Baptism—the assurance that **even if this child's earthly life would be short, she would forever be safe in the arms of her Savior.**

The baby came early, but in God's perfect timing. Little Alicia arrived, and God's Word joined with water. Her adoption into the family of God was sealed by Jesus' own promise through the gift of Baptism.

Then life seemed to come to a halt. Trisomy 13—a consequence of sin and part of this broken world—showed itself in tears, agony, and pain. And little Alicia was no longer in the hands of her loved ones, but in the hands of her loving Father and Savior in

heaven. Heaven is now her home. And heaven is our home too. Amazing Grace was able to share that for Christmas, in the delivery room, and at the funeral of this little girl.

Esteban and Marisol are continuing to learn more about God's Word, the waters of Baptism, and the comfort of God's promises. They are learning what it means that God graciously gives himself to us—as a baby in Bethlehem, as our King, and as the Savior who endured pain, agony, and death so that death would never have the final word for his people. So, we celebrate our babies, our families, our life to come, because that baby in Bethlehem also died for you and me. We don't just celebrate the baby born for all; we share what he means to all.

FROM HANS THOMFORD, home missionary at Amazing Grace, Amarillo, Texas





Faces of Faith—Jill



For years, Jill wanted nothing to do with church. She had been raised as a Christian, but after a painful divorce and the loss of close family relationships, her anger toward God ran deep. Church felt like the last place she wanted to be. Prayer seemed pointless. Faith felt distant. Even when Jill

found love again with her husband, Luke, that distance remained. God was easy to blame, and easier to avoid.

Then came an invitation that would not go away.

Luke's grandfather, known as Papa, kept inviting them to church. They resisted until one Easter Sunday in 2022 when they finally agreed. One and done, they said. But when they walked into Illumine in Rock Hill, S.C., something felt different. They felt welcomed.

They felt seen. And before leaving the parking lot, Jill heard words she never expected. "Are we going back next Sunday?"

Through God's Word and a church family, Jill's perspective began to change.



Watch Jill's
Faces of Faith story at
wels.net/faces-of-faith-jill



Faces of Faith—Omar

The phone rang. I didn't recognize the number, but I answered. Without an introduction, he simply said, "I'd like to get baptized." He knew Baptism was important to Christians, but he knew next to nothing about Christianity. Still, he wanted to give it a try.

I told him, "Can I teach you what Christianity is all about? Then if you still want to be baptized, I'd be honored to do it." He couldn't wait to start.

I got to know Omar. He was in Las Cruces completing a graduate program. He had grown up in a predominantly Muslim country but had come to believe that any truth about God was unknowable. He had never read the New Testament or attended a Christian worship service. But a Christian coworker he respected had mentioned Lutheranism once, and some especially difficult life struggles had left him searching for something more.

As we studied the Bible, Omar got to know Jesus as his God, friend, and Savior who has forgiven him at the cross. Through Jesus' resurrection, Omar came to know his eternal life was guaranteed. Christ's promises and unconditional love brought him peace, hope, and purpose, even during extremely trying times.

Four lessons in, Omar said, "I still don't really know why I called you a few weeks ago or what I believed then. But I believe this. I believe in Jesus."



He attended his first worship services on Good Friday and Easter. Soon after, he was baptized into Christ. Not long after that, he joyfully became a member.

And then, just as quickly, he packed up and moved away. It's the fastest we've ever "lost" a new member. But Omar wasn't lost at all. He was finally found. Omar had accepted a job in River Falls, Wisconsin. There he continues to get to know Jesus better as a member of another WELS church, Faith. Omar's story is a reminder that God is at work in ways we do not always see, calling people to faith through his Word and keeping them in his grace wherever they go!

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



Walking together in the Great Commission through mission trips.

Learn more and apply at
wels.net/missionjourneys.





100 MISSIONS IN 10 YEARS

WELS Home Missions approved **six new home mission starts and enhancements** in March 2026. That equates to a total of 31 new starts and 27 enhancements as we work towards our synod's goal of starting 100 missions and enhancing 75 ministries by 2033.

NEW HOME MISSION STARTS



Bastrop, Texas:

Located about 25 miles east of Austin, Bastrop is experiencing rapid growth fueled by new residential development and expanding economic activity. Major employers now headquartered in Bastrop, including X and Starlink, have drawn new families to the area. As Bastrop continues to expand, many residents lack church connections, and a confessional Lutheran presence remains limited. Members of Holy Word in Austin, Texas, have formed a committed core group that has been meeting regularly, engaging the community through service and outreach, and building relationships with residents. Bastrop presents a timely opportunity for a new Home Mission start.



Greeneville represents an opportunity to establish a confessional Lutheran presence in a community where none currently exists.



North Marana, Ariz.:

North Marana is one of the fastest growing areas in the Tucson metro area, now home to more than 60,000 residents. A new mission effort—known locally as Mission Marana—is already active in the community, with a committed core group that gathers for Bible study and regularly serves at local events across North Marana. With strong local leadership and a clear focus on serving before being served, this new mission is positioned to grow alongside a rapidly expanding population of young families.



Greeneville, Tenn.:

Greeneville is a growing community positioned between the Johnson City/Kingsport/Bristol metro area and Knoxville. While the area reflects strong Bible Belt culture and openness to conversations about faith, currently no confessional Lutheran church serves the community. A



committed core group, supported by nearby WELS congregations in Johnson City and Morristown, has been meeting regularly and actively engaging with the community.

The work of WELS Home Missions through the **100 Missions in 10 Years initiative closely reflects the synod's long-range strategic plan**, "Christ through us." Its focus on strategic church planting and ministry enhancement directly supports the plan's **Congregations priority**, helping churches reach new people with the gospel and strengthen ministry where God is already at work.

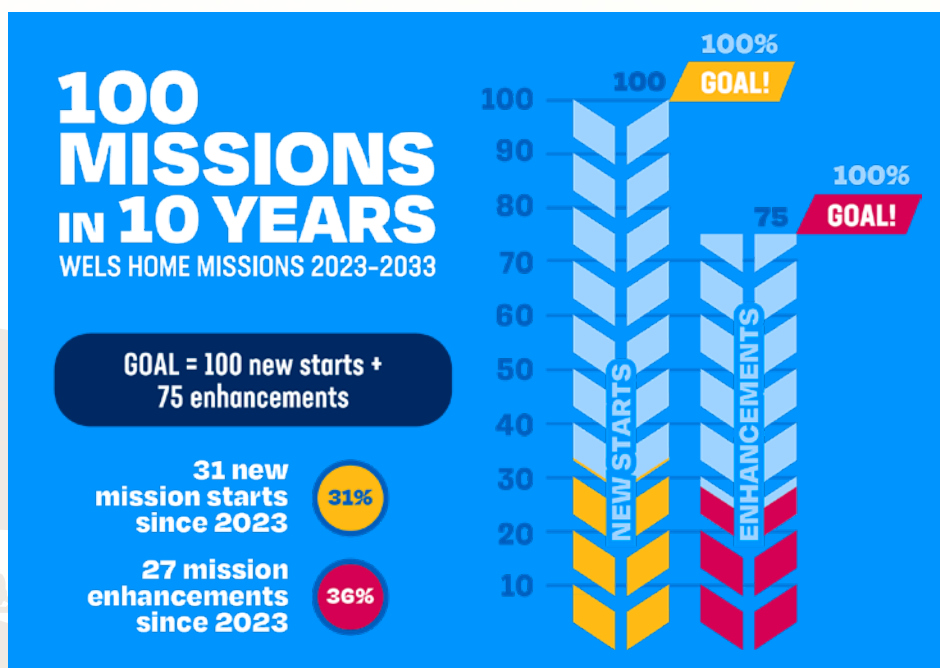
ENHANCEMENTS



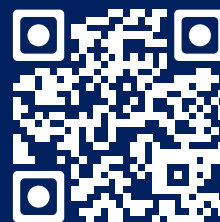
Home Missions enhancements provide short-term funding to help congregations expand their outreach efforts. This could include calling an additional pastor, staff minister or lay staff member; starting a cross-cultural ministry; or restarting a church where members have renewed their efforts to go with the gospel into their community.

- ★ Good Shepherd, Holmen, Wis.
- ★ Resurrection, Chesapeake, Va.

- ★ Mount Olive, St. Paul, Minn.



READ MORE
about these
new starts and
enhancements at
wels100in10.net.



Mount Olive, St. Paul, Minn.

Faces of Faith—Kyle



With nearly 1,900 churches in Chicago proper, finding a church home can feel overwhelming. When Kyle Boone moved into the city permanently after graduating college, he knew he wanted to continue

following Jesus, but the search was not easy.

“The example my parents set was a big reason I wanted to stay connected to church,” Kyle says. “I’ve seen firsthand how influential Christ is in their lives, and I wanted that, too. But searching for a church in the city was a struggle. I often left wondering whether the message was really pointing us in the right direction.”

Finally, a friend helped change that. Kyle works alongside fellow Loyola University alum Nathanael in the university’s athletic department, Kyle, as a graphic designer, and Nathanael, as a videographer. “I definitely have Nathanael to thank for bringing up Crossroads. I heard him talking about it and asked if I could join him.” And the rest was history; Kyle officially joined Crossroads in February 2026.

Kyle did not wait long to get involved. As a mission restart, Crossroads was rebranding, including a new logo and social media presence. Nathanael oversees the church’s social accounts, and when it came time to design a logo, Kyle was a natural fit.

Kyle was led to Jesus and is now leading others to Jesus. His parents pointed him in the right direction. **A friend led him to a church grounded in truth.** And now, Kyle is ready to lead others in the right direction at Crossroads.

FROM JACOB BORGWARDT, [home missionary at Crossroads, Chicago, Ill.](#)

Faces of Faith—Susan

My wife, Miriam (pictured second from right), was delivering welcome packets and a small gift from The Vine to new residents in our community when she met Susan (pictured right), a friendly widow who had recently moved to Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Miriam invited her to church, but she didn’t commit right away.



Before Miriam left, Susan mentioned she needed help breaking down boxes from her move. The next day, I stopped by, cleared out the boxes filling her garage, and invited her to church as well. She once again didn’t commit, but she did share she needed help changing a light fixture. One of our members, Dan (pictured left), went over the next day, took care of it, and invited her to church too. She still didn’t commit to coming.

The following Sunday, Susan came to worship. She has been back every week since.

God uses simple acts of service and repeated invitations to remind us that helping someone in need and inviting them to church is never wasted time. God blesses mission work, often in unexpected ways.

FROM KEVIN SCHULTZ (pictured second from left), [home missionary at The Vine, Hayden, Idaho](#)

Faces of Faith—Pat

Confession. Penance. Good works. Offerings. Attendance at Mass. Praying to Mary and the saints. Earning indulgences. Praying for the souls in Purgatory. For more than 60 years, that was my “ticket” to eternity, or at least a shorter stay in Purgatory. But when I was elevated in the church’s fraternal organization, a good friend warned me that I was about to see behind the curtain. He was right.

Everything I thought earned my place before God was null and void. All the time, effort, and money I believed were necessary for salvation had already been taken care of on the cross. Yet these ideas had been drilled into me since childhood. For the first 20 years of my life, I never studied the Bible. Scripture came only through readings during Mass, and as a child, they were in Latin. God’s Word was something I heard, not something I knew. Change does not come easily later in life, but change was unavoidable.

My wife and I retired to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and began visiting community churches. I did my research before getting involved. While many churches were Bible-based, there were still requirements placed on faith and salvation.

Then I met a neighbor, Kevin (pictured right). He invited me to try Amazing Grace. I went, mostly to satisfy Kevin. I was looking for reasons not to come back. I had been warned about Lutherans. But after that first service, something stirred in my heart. Reading Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses helped me understand why.

I went back. After meeting with Pastor Ben Zahn, I realized I was not alone. Luther did not set out to change Christian history. He simply wanted to correct errors by returning to Scripture. I found myself questioning the same things.

At Amazing Grace, **I found the foundation of true faith. No earning. No extra requirements. No striving for a better seat in a place that does not exist.**

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the debt had already been paid.



Pastor Zahn led me through Starting Point classes, explaining the fundamentals of faith and how they are grounded in God’s Word. Through daily Scripture reading, my life changed. I no longer question whether I have earned my place in God’s kingdom. It was already done.

I found a second family at Amazing Grace. I found a second chance. Jesus placed a neighbor and pastor in my life when I did not even know what I needed. And all it took was an invitation: “Hey, give us a try.”

FROM PAT HOGAN
(pictured left),
member at Amazing
Grace, Myrtle Beach, S.C.



Faces of Faith—Cengiz



My story begins with Joy, someone whose faith left a deep impression on me. She was one of the most sincere and faithful people I had ever met. As a young single mother, she balanced raising her child, continuing her education, and building a future with patience and

dignity. What stood out most was how naturally her faith was visible in her daily life, from praying before meals to her choices and the boundaries she kept.

At the time I did not realize how much those moments were affecting me. When our relationship ended, my heart broke. I found myself replaying memories, especially about how faith seemed to guide her life. In that painful season, something unexpected began to grow. I started asking questions. Why did she pray

so naturally? What gave her such peace? Who was the Lord she trusted so deeply?

Because I was raised in a Muslim background, those questions led me on a deeper search. I began reading about the gospel and the life of Jesus Christ. **The more I learned, the more I discovered a kind of love I had never known.**

In my brokenness, the Lord met me. Through reading, conversations, and unexpected moments, Christ lifted my eyes beyond what I had lost and toward what would last.

I came to see that the love I thought I had lost was not the end of my story. In many ways, it was the beginning. God used Joy's quiet faith to point me to a greater love, the love of Jesus Christ, who gave himself so that we might receive forgiveness and eternal life. Today, I walk in faith as a Christian, grateful for the grace that found me when I was most broken.

FROM CENGIZ TELLI, member at Ascension, Harrisburg, Pa.

Faces of Faith—Sacha



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CROSS-CULTURAL
MISSIONS

"Throughout my life, I have seen the faithfulness of God guiding my steps, even in seasons when I did not fully understand where he was leading me," Sacha De Souza says. "Looking back,

I can see how he placed people along my path to lead me closer to him."

Sacha's journey took shape when she was training to become a teacher. One of her classmates was a member of St. John's and teacher at the school and would often invite her to St. John's to study with her.

"Each time I went, I felt welcomed,"

Sacha recalls. "It was peaceful and filled with a strong sense of community, and what began as a place to work soon became a place where I felt I belonged."

Those visits gradually led to something more. Sacha began attending worship and learning about the teachings of the Lutheran church. She enrolled in New Member Foundation classes, became part of the congregation, and today serves as Grade 3 teacher at St. John's. God knew all along what lay ahead and planned for it—Sacha's need for a Christian community and the school's need for a Lutheran teacher.

"Now my greatest desire is to live faithfully for him, serving him in my spiritual walk, in his church, and in the classroom where he has called me to teach," shares Sacha.

FROM JONATHAN KEHL, home missionary at St. John's, Saint John, Antigua



Faces of Faith—Andrew

Growing up in a Vietnamese Buddhist household, my spirituality was more cultural tradition than personal connection. For years I pursued a career and family without ever asking why. I was building my life on a foundation I had never truly examined.

Everything changed when I learned that I had been adopted, something I had never known before. It felt as though the floor dropped out from under me. The life I thought I understood suddenly felt like a script someone else had written. It was a difficult season, a time of deep uncertainty that left me feeling unanchored. I turned to every self-help tool I could find, but nothing quieted the fear that I did not truly belong anywhere.

In the middle of that struggle, I came across a prayer on social media. In that moment, I felt a warmth and security I cannot fully explain, a sense of being accepted exactly as I was. The next day, I bought a Bible. When the cashier asked if I was “beginning a journey,” I could barely hold back my emotions. For the first time, my search was met with a tangible sense of love.

Lauren, my girlfriend at the time and now my wife, walked with me through this season. Together, we began learning about Christianity, watching sermons, and exploring different perspectives online. We were searching for something true. Eventually, we found a YouTube sermon that resonated deeply with us. To our surprise, the pastor was right here in our community.

That search led us to Pastor Caleb Schultz at Cross of Life. Coming from a non-religious background, we arrived with many questions. Pastor Caleb walked alongside us. Through the Faith Builders program, I came to see the gospel not as a set of rules, but as the good news of Christ.

I learned that my true **identity is not found in my past or in unanswered questions about where I came from. It is found in Christ alone.** Lauren and I saw the Holy Spirit quietly at work in our lives and our relationship. I was baptized in 2025, and today we are grateful members of the Cross of Life congregation. What began as a desperate search for identity ended with finding a place where I am truly known.

FROM ANDREW LU, member at Cross of Life,
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

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NEW MISSION STARTS/
ENHANCEMENTS
APPROVED IN
2026

Faces of Faith—Jett



Growing up, Jett never imagined he would identify with the prodigal son.

He was raised in the church, attending worship, Sunday school, and confirmation classes. But as he got older, his priorities

shifted. Church faded into

the background, and faith no longer shaped his daily life. Throughout high school and college, Jett drifted away, chasing success, achievement, and fulfillment in all the usual places. Yet those pursuits left him feeling empty.

At a public university filled with distractions and pressure, Jett began asking hard questions. What was he really chasing? Was it enough? Slowly, he found himself drawn back to church, back to the place where his faith first took root. That return led him to Anchor in Marquette, Michigan, where he found more than a Sunday service. **He found a church family, a renewed purposed, and a faith that now shapes how he lives and leads others.**

Watch Jett's
Faces of Faith story at
wels.net/faces-of-faith-jett



Anchor in Marquette, Mich., was approved in 2023

Faces of Faith—Huanhuan and Guoyong

Huanhuan and Guoyong started as dance partners at age 12, unaware that God was already writing a greater story. Both raised in nonbelieving families, they studied at a prestigious dance academy in Beijing, where they were first introduced to Christianity. A friend gave Huanhuan a Bible, and she was captivated by what she read. Around the same time, their English teacher, Mrs. Ma, shared her own newly found faith after experiencing God's comfort during cancer treatments. She began worshipping at a local church and invited the students to join her. Huanhuan and Guoyong accepted her invitation and eventually decided to be baptized.

After graduating, they married and taught ballroom dance in Beijing before moving to Milan to train under former world champions. Their dedication paid off in 2007, when they won the professional show dance category at the World Dance Council World Championship. Their journey later brought them to Houston, Texas, where they now own a dance studio.

In 2022, Huanhuan was in a serious car accident that left her with neck injuries. Unable to dance, or even drive, the accident took a toll on both her physical and mental well-being. While she never lost faith, she did find herself in a very dark, lonely place. One night, she had a dream in which God was telling her to attend church that Sunday. Still feeling unstable,

she managed to go. She was taken aback when images of people in neck braces appeared on the screen, and the pastor began talking about his own neck injuries and the hardships they caused. **In that moment, Huanhuan felt God meeting her exactly where she was, reminding her that she was not alone.**

Today, Huanhuan and Guoyong are members of Divine Savior, where they love helping visitors feel welcome. And while Huanhuan still lives with the effects of her neck injuries, she doesn't let them slow her down when it comes to sharing the gospel. She considers it an honor to tell others about the true God, doing so with the same unstoppable passion and enthusiasm that once made her and Guoyong world dance champions.

FROM HUANHUAN SHE AND GUOYONG ZHANG, members at Divine Savior, Sienna, Texas





Faces of Faith—Rishin

One night, one of our campus ministry student leaders invited a friend to my all-time favorite fellowship activity: laser tag. That friend brought another friend, Rishin Patra.

When Rishin eventually came to one of our Wednesday Bible studies, his interest was piqued. He asked questions, and I suggested that we meet for coffee. There, he told me he considered himself an atheist. I had never really sat down with a self-professed atheist before. But as we talked, it became clear that his questions were the same ones I've heard

lifelong Christians ask. “Why does God let people suffer? Where did we come from and why are we here? If God is really out there, why doesn't he just tell us?” He wasn't trying to win an argument. He genuinely wanted to know if anyone could answer those existential questions.

But after several meetings, the Word did its quiet work on Rishin. He saw **not a book of regulations, but a Savior who suffered, died, and rose for him. The Word had sparked faith in his heart.** I don't know exactly when it happened, but I will always remember one conversation. We talked about how prayer is a unique gift for Christians because it's an act of faith. He paused for a moment, then said, “Well, I guess I can pray now because I think I am a Christian.” I assured him that he was. The Spirit had created faith in his heart through the promises of Jesus, who had died and risen for him.

On paper, it sounds dramatic—a former atheist becomes a Christian. But the Spirit did what he always does. Through the simple Word of Christ, he created faith.

We know the Spirit doesn't work through laser tag, but we'll keep playing at least once a semester because sometimes it opens a door. And when it does, the Word does what only the Word can do.

FROM THOMAS WELCH, campus ministry pastor at Peace, Houghton, Mich.



FINANCIALLY
SUPPORTS NEARLY

50
CAMPUS
MINISTRIES



DEAR FRIENDS OF MISSIONS,

Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord declares, “My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets” (Malachi 1:11). That promise echoes throughout Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Christ’s commission to his church—to bring the message of reconciliation to every nation, tribe, people, and language. God gives us a glimpse of its final outcome in Revelation: a countless multitude, gathered before the Lamb.

The stories you will read in *Faces of Faith* are living proof that the Lord is keeping this promise. Around the world, the Lord is opening doors—training pastors, planting churches, and gathering believers into fellowship through the faithful proclamation of his Word. While Christianity wanes in parts of the Western world, the gospel flourishes where it is newly proclaimed. Yet more than 6.5 billion people still live in places where Christ’s name is scarcely known.

In these pages, you will meet people who are hearing the gospel for the first

time. You will see congregations taking root in new communities, and church bodies growing strong enough to train leaders and reach others with the same saving message. Each account points beyond human effort to the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies his church across cultures and continents.

This is God’s mission—and it will triumph because he has promised it. We sow the seed faithfully; God gives the growth. Through your prayers and support, you are part of this work, helping carry the pure gospel to places where Christ is still unknown. As you turn the page, rejoice in what the Lord is doing today! Look ahead with confidence, trusting that his name will indeed be great among the nations.

PASTOR LARRY SCHLOMER,
World Missions administrator

WORLD

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PROSPECTIVE
NEW MISSION
FIELDS



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**wels.net/
wmgift.**





WELS WORLD MISSIONS

conducts and encourages gospel outreach in 48 countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 25 prospective new mission fields. World Missions brings the light of God's Word to the world through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials in foreign languages.



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 exploring outreach opportunities and following up on promising contacts identified through Multi-Language Production's TELL* program in 15 countries. Nine missionaries serve on the One Africa Team, one of whom works exclusively with the TELL program.

**Think. Evaluate. Learn. Lead.*



LEARN MORE at
wels.net/africa



ASIA-OCEANIA

The Asia-Oceania Team is made up of 18 missionaries serving 19 different countries throughout Asia and Oceania. The team—with members in Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Australia—partners with God's people to equip, encourage, and empower others to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the billions still lost in darkness. The Asia-Oceania Team explores new mission opportunities, supports existing sister synods, and trains current and future leaders for service in their churches through Asia Lutheran Seminary.



LEARN MORE at
wels.net/asia-oceania



EUROPE

The Europe mission team partners to share Christ's grace across the continent, supporting gospel outreach and assisting with theological education and ministry training in 13 different countries. This work is carried out through collaborative ministry efforts with sister churches, grounded in a shared confession of faith. Three WELS missionaries reside in Europe.



LEARN MORE at
wels.net/europe



LATIN AMERICA

The One Latin America 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. Through its discipleship and church planting courses, more than 57 trained leaders are currently leading new church plants (*Grupos Sembrador*). This work is supported by 11 missionaries serving on the One Latin America Team.



LEARN MORE at
[wels.net/
latinamerica](https://wels.net/latinamerica)



NATIVE AMERICAN MISSIONS

The Apache mission in Arizona celebrated 125 years of God's blessings in 2018 as the first world mission of WELS. Today, WELS' Native American mission serves nine churches and two elementary schools, and it provides theological education through the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) on the White Mountain 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 team.



LEARN MORE at
[wels.net/native
americanmissions](https://wels.net/nativeamericanmissions)



MULTI-LANGUAGE PRODUCTIONS

Multi-Language Productions (MLP) has created video, audio, and print resources in 56 languages for use in global gospel outreach, with nearly three million resources distributed worldwide. It also operates the TELL Network, an online training and church multiplication program offered in English, Mandarin, Spanish, and Tagalog.

Working closely with WELS world mission 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.



LEARN MORE at
wels.net/mlp

WORLD MISSIONS
JOIN THE MISSION
WELS

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*“My name
will be great
among the nations,
... says the
LORD Almighty”
(Malachi 1:11).*

WORLD MISSIONS LONG-RANGE PLAN

At the 2025 Synod Convention, WELS adopted the “Christ through us” long-range strategic plan, built around four priorities: Culture, Congregations, Commission, and Calling. The synod envisions a bold expansion of its global gospel outreach through the “Commission” priority, which **sets a goal of reaching one million believers worldwide by 2035**. This isn’t just a numeric milestone—it’s a growing family of faith. **With about 330,000 WELS members in North America and around 300,000 in partner churches globally already part of this fellowship, that goal is within reach.**

To support this vision, World Missions has outlined five goals:

Forge a borderless support network:

Envision a wave of generosity—resources, prayers, people—flowing freely across nations. We’ll encourage a fellowship so strong it transcends flags, uniting us as one body in Christ’s work, fueled by U.S. and global churches.



Equip a global missionary force:

We’ll empower foreign missionaries from our sister churches, turning receivers into senders. With training and support, they’ll spread the gospel with borderless boldness into their own countries and beyond—imagine Kenyan pastors reaching Sudanese refugees, or Filipino leaders planting in Singapore.

Establish confessional Lutheran seminaries:

We will help establish four confessional Lutheran seminary programs with partner churches—centers of doctrine and devotion—serving as trusted hubs to equip pastors and leaders worldwide. Building on work in Hong Kong, Zambia, Germany, and Latin America, these aren’t just schools; they’re beacons of faithful teaching.

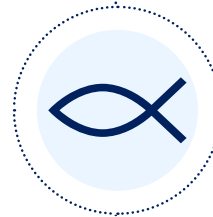


Expand multi-language mission efforts:

As churches grow across the globe, we’ll remove language barriers that hinder access to God’s Word. Trusting the Holy Spirit, we’ll equip believers with faithful resources to grow in faith and proclaim Christ boldly in their own languages and cultures.

Pioneer missions in high-risk and unreachable areas:

Where the gospel faces resistance or remains hidden, we’ll act with courage and care as Christ’s ambassadors. Through prayerful, context-specific approaches and trusted workers, we’ll extend Christ’s reconciling love to people long cut off from its light, trusting the Holy Spirit to open doors and pierce the darkness at the farthest edges of the world.





Faces of Faith—Rena

I grew up in an environment steeped in traditional customs. Every festival involved rituals of worship. Elders murmured prayers while offering sacrifices, and incense smoke filled the air. As a child, I was only a bystander. I watched with confusion, unable to understand the prayers or their meaning. To me, these rituals were simply habits passed down through generations. I dismissed them as superstition, and for many years I was a firm atheist.

As I traveled, I encountered other religions, including Christianity. At first, I was drawn not by belief, but by the beauty of Gothic cathedrals with their vaulted ceilings, stained glass, and sculptures. Sitting quietly, I felt a deep sense of reverence. On another occasion, I heard a choir singing inside a church. Their voices brought joy and peace that I could not explain. I loved the feeling, but I didn't know why.

The real change came through a dear friend and colleague, Ms. Liu, who invited me to a small gathering where we studied the Bible. At first, I listened with curiosity but was still detached from the message. Over time, questions about life that once felt unclear began to come into focus. As a biology teacher, I spend my days studying the intricate structures of life. The double helix of DNA, the workings of a cell, and the balance of ecosystems all display a beauty and order that science alone cannot fully explain.

I had once attributed this mystery to the limits of my knowledge. Gradually, I began to see the possibility of a Great Creator behind it all.

If exploring the world allowed me to glimpse God, then the lowest moments of my life allowed me to truly meet him. After betrayal in my marriage and struggles with my child, I found myself exhausted and hopeless. In those darkest days, I remembered Ms. Liu's encouragement and walked into that Bible study again, this time as a lost soul seeking redemption.

Through the love of fellow believers and the comfort of God's Word, light slowly broke through my darkness. God had heard my silent cries and had come to save me. Now, when life feels overwhelming, I turn to him in prayer and find strength, comfort, and hope. Step by step, God led me from disbelief to faith and into the light of Christ.

FROM RENA, a woman recently baptized by an Asia-Oceania Team missionary in East Asia

In 2025, there were **8,275 baptisms** and **10,126 confirmations** across Asia-Oceania.



Faces of Faith—Abraham

Desiring to serve others faithfully and to share the gospel with clarity and compassion, Abraham joined the TELL Network. The training he has received through TELL has helped him grow in his faith and speak Christ-centered truth rooted in Scripture. This training immediately strengthened his ministry, equipping him to reach people with backgrounds similar to his own. His faith journey is an example of how God may use someone to plant the seed and another to water it, and ultimately, God alone causes it to grow.

Abraham lives in Uganda, where faith is closely tied to community identity. He was raised as a Muslim and firmly grounded in the beliefs of his family and community. Yet God was at work. When Christian leaders began holding meetings nearby, Abraham, a respected community leader, allowed them to gather out of a desire for peace and even opened some of their sessions. Many in the Muslim community became angry and accused him of betrayal.

Those Christians continued to show patience and love. They came to Abraham's home, prayed with him, and spoke plainly about Jesus Christ. Through their faithful witness, the Holy Spirit worked and brought Abraham to faith. He publicly confessed Christ, even writing a letter to the local Muslim leaders declaring that he was leaving the mosque.

That confession came at a steep cost. Abraham faced severe persecution. He was rejected by those who once called him friend, and threats were made against his life. Yet Abraham remained steadfast. Anchored in the promises of Christ, he continued to grow in faith, trusting that obedience to Jesus is worth the cost, even when the road is painful.

The Lord is blessing this work. Today, the majority of Abraham's congregation consists of former Muslims. Because he understands their questions and fears firsthand, he speaks with humility, patience, and credibility. Abraham is also training other leaders using the TELL method. This ministry bore visible fruit in February 2026 when 17 children and young adults were baptized.

Abraham and the members of Adonai Lutheran Evangelical Ministry (pictured below) recently joined in fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod, WELS' sister church in Uganda. **Through the training and support he has received from TELL, Abraham is being equipped to shepherd others** with confidence and Christ-centered care. Abraham's journey—from persecution to pastoral leadership—stands as a living witness to the power of the gospel.

FROM JOEL HOFF,
TELL Network missionary

More than **2,000** students in **30** countries throughout Africa have completed at least one live TELL Discipleship course.



Faces of Faith - Néstor

“The blind can’t lead the blind.” That’s what Néstor García Enriquez told me the first time I met him in Oaxaca, Mexico, when I asked why he was studying with *Academia Cristo*.

A few years ago, Néstor began gathering three people for Bible study. That group has now grown to more than twenty and meets three times a week—on Wednesdays for prayer, Thursdays for Bible study, and Sundays for worship. Néstor has even converted half of his house into a chapel where they gather.

The group began after Néstor left a congregation that was not centered on the truths of God’s Word. Yet he did not take the responsibility of leading the group lightly. At first, he asked others to serve as pastors. He was willing to organize the gatherings and provide a place to meet but preaching and teaching were not something he had planned to do. After working with two different pastors, however, he realized the group needed steady leadership and stepped in to guide the group, but he remained concerned about “the blind leading the blind.”



That’s when he found *Academia Cristo*. Today, Néstor has completed the Discipleship Level of the program and is continuing his studies in the Church Planting Level. Through his training, he has grown in his understanding of how all Scripture points to Christ. He has learned to apply law and gospel clearly, and he regularly uses *Academia Cristo* resources to help guide the group in its spiritual growth.

Over the years, Néstor has had a variety of vocations. He has been a teacher, a car salesman, and the owner of a taco stand. Today he runs a bakery and a small lunch stand. Recently I had the opportunity to spend time with him making bread deliveries and helping during the lunch rush. **During countless interactions with customers, Néstor initiated spiritual conversations and invited people to his group.** He did it as a well-trained and called *Academia Cristo* church planter (*Grupos sembrador*), serving faithfully so that more people can see the beauty of God’s grace.

FROM MATT BEHMER,
Latin America missionary

More than **57 church plants** have been started by *Academia Cristo* students.



René (right) pictured with fellow seminary student Benjamin Hugk (left)

In 2026, the ELFK, WELS' sister church in Germany, marks its **150th anniversary and 150 years of fellowship** with WELS.

Faces of Faith—René

Eight weeks in jail. One book: the Bible.

René Schrader knew something about this book. He had been baptized as a child, went to church at Christmas, and even sang in a children's choir. In 7th grade, a teacher told him how Jesus was crucified, and how the temple curtain tore from top to bottom the moment of his death. "That story gave me goosebumps! But I didn't believe it."

Now René sat in a cell with nothing to do and plenty of time. He picked up the Bible and read. Two weeks later, he finished. "I understood the Bible was a good book. The stories were interesting. They had lots of details that didn't sound made-up." René wondered if the stories could be true, but he didn't investigate further.

Thirteen years passed. Much happened. Then one day René woke up from surgery and felt empty. Nothing helped—not friends, games, or drugs. He realized his emptiness was spiritual. It was time to dig into the Bible.

René watched videos and found helpful online commentaries. He started to understand basic Christian teaching. Sin, grace, Christ, redemption. He listened to Christian apologists defend the doctrine of the Trinity. Father and Son were familiar, but who is the Holy Spirit?

René picked up his Bible and searched. This was not easy! He read how Jesus taught his disciples the night before he died. Jesus made a promise, "The Advocate,

the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. . . . The Spirit of truth . . . will testify about me. . . . He will guide you into all the truth" (John 14:26–16:13).

"The more I looked up passages about the Holy Spirit, the more I figured out about Jesus." One day René finally understood. It's true! Jesus is God in the flesh. He died for the sins of the world. "He died for me. He rose from the dead. I felt the weight of the world lifted from my shoulders. I didn't have to carry it anymore because Jesus already carried it for me." René wept, overwhelmed with relief.

Today René is a seminary student in Leipzig, Germany. "I still don't know how I got here!" he says with a laugh.

"When I told my mom that I was studying for ministry, she said, 'Finally you are doing something good with you life!'"

René now shares the Savior with many people—including his mother. "You know, Mom, Jesus loves you. He died for you. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16). What do you think about that?"

"That's beautiful," she murmurs.

FROM LUKE WOLFGRAMM,
WELS Europe Team Leader

Faces of Faith—Durga

Durga Prasad, his wife, and their two children live in India in a city of 600,000 people. He lives with his extended family, following strict Hindu religious customs and festivals. One of our church members lives near Durga's house.

Whenever I visited that believer, Durga watched me closely. He did not like Christianity and often boasted about his Hindu gods. Then his mother became sick and suddenly passed away, shocking the entire family.

I went to his house with the church believer to try and provide comfort. I asked them, "Shall I pray for you?" They agreed. Then I read Jesus' words in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life," and prayed for them.

I returned one week later. Durga asked me, "What is the meaning of your reading?" I explained that Jesus is the only true God and way to heaven. He asked, "What about my gods? They are the way to Moksha (heaven)." But I showed him the Bible verses that say we're all sinners, but God sent his Son, Jesus, to be the atoning sacrifice for the whole world. After hearing these verses, he was silent. I prayed for the family's comfort and left. The Holy Spirit started to work in him as he thought about these verses.

Two months later, I went to his house and invited Durga's family to our Christmas program. He came and heard the Christmas message that Jesus was born to save us from our sins and gives life those who believe. He started coming to church with the believer who lives next to him and listened to God's Word. When the new year came, he asked me to baptize him. He confessed that he is a sinner, was baptized, and received Christ's forgiveness. He began bringing his wife and children to church.

But his family became very angry. They scolded both of us and set up an intervention with his relatives. His father said, "He is not my son. He doesn't belong to my family. I hate Christianity, and I don't want my

son to be Christian." The relatives urged Durga to return to their traditions and avoid being cast out of the home. But Durga said, **"I need Jesus more than anything you could give me."**

His relatives abandoned him and his family and sent them out of their house. But God provided for him. He found another small house for his family as the church continues to encourage and pray for him. We thank and praise God for his salvation. Please keep him in your prayers as he grows in his faith.

FROM PASTOR MANIKUMAR,
Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) in India



More than **110,000 people** gather around God's Word each week across Asia-Oceania.

WELS is working with **3,250+ pastors/spiritual leaders** in Asia-Oceania.

Faces of Faith—Miguel

A busca is what Argentinians call someone who scours garage sales, auctions, and thrift shops for items of value to sell. The Spanish word busca literally means “searcher,” because they’re always searching for the next treasure. They have an eye for things of value that they can pass on to others. Miguel Ancarola is a busca and makes his living buying and selling. He is always searching. Our paths crossed because of a different kind of search.

Although Miguel was baptized in the Catholic Church as a baby, he was not instructed in God’s Word and later fell away. He was an unbeliever until he met a Christian woman who brought him back to God’s Word. Miguel began attending church and studying Scripture, reading everything he could find. Before long, he realized the church he was attending was not teaching God’s Word in its truth and purity.

And so began his search. Miguel moved from church to church and searched online for a group that taught directly from Scripture. He compared his experience to the words of 1 John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us.” Miguel reflected, “The Spirit gave me discernment and said, no, this isn’t it.”

Then one day he stumbled upon a site that seemed to offer something of real value: *Academia Cristo*. And it was free! He completed the self-guided portion of the studies in a week and entered live classes. After about a year and a half in the Discipleship Level of courses, and with a storehouse of treasures from God’s Word, Miguel was ready to share.

Today, he speaks with anyone in his community who will listen. He tells them about his search and about the treasure we have in Jesus, who considered us a treasure and came to find us. The profit is far greater than any earthly gain. **These are treasures stored up in heaven, for Miguel and for all who hear the good news.**

FROM ZACH SATORIUS,
Latin America missionary

More than **179 students** have completed the entire **Discipleship Level of courses**, the second of three *Academia Cristo* course levels.



Faces of Faith - Alexander



Raised in a small village in Kenya, Alexander Omollo did not grow up as a Christian. In 1993, he was imprisoned and faced a possible death sentence. While in prison, members of the Lutheran church regularly visited him to preach and teach God's love and forgiveness. The Holy Spirit was at work.

After serving 11 years, he was released, an experience he describes as life-changing. Alexander found hope through Christ, which helped him see beyond his despair.

Today, he is grateful to be alive, reunited with his family, and serving the Lord. **He shared his newfound faith with his family, who also grew to love and believe in Christ.**

He generously donated land to the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ-Kenya so the Luara congregation would have a place to worship.

The land he donated was also the location for the 2026 Central Africa Medical Mission (CAMM) medical camp where members of the church, CAMM, and government volunteers interacted with close to 2,400 patients. Thankful for the faith he received through God's Word, Alexander saw the medical camp as a blessing and a chance to serve others with Christ's love while sharing the hope of Jesus with patients.

FROM ANGELA SIEVERT, Central Africa Medical Mission chairwoman



CAMM relies on **45 nurses, clinicians, and pharmacists** to treat over **500 patients** each day at Kenyan medical camps.



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