



First Things – May, 2022

Where Are We Headed And Why?

Worship attendance is down. That's a fact. And it's not just because of COVID, although the pandemic certainly didn't help the situation. In 2009, 48% of American Christians said they worshipped *every week*. By 2020, the percentage of weekly worshippers shrank to 25%! In other words, weekly worship attendance in 2020 as COVID began was about HALF of what it was eleven years before. And this decline is across all age groups. In fact, a higher percentage of "baby boomers" (roughly ages 55-75) stopped attending weekly worship than "millennials" (roughly ages 25-40). As one of my fellow pastors put it, "We have to realize that *regular worship* no longer means weekly worship, it means *maybe once a month*."

It's important that we recognize this trend for what it is – SIN. In the Third Commandment, the LORD said, "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy." And Luther explained it by saying, "We should fear and love God that we DO NOT DESPISE preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and GLADLY HEAR AND LEARN it."

And what leads us – all of us – to despise preaching and his Word? It's the same UNHOLY THREE that leads us to every type of sin:

1. The DEVIL whispers in our hear, *it won't hurt if you skip church every once in a while*.
2. The WORLD around us by and large rejects what the Bible has to say. Most people don't worship God anymore. What's worse, increasingly they scorn those who do.
3. The SINFUL NATURE (or FLESH) in each one of us tells us that we've got *too much to do*, or that we need to *rest*.

Listening to the unholy three leads to a weak faith, to despair – and can ultimately lead to hell.

But two things fight against the unholy three. 1) Every believer has a NEW SELF. The new self loves God and loves to hear his Word. 2) Reading, hearing, studying, thinking about his Word empowers us to resist the unholy three, and to do what he wants, to do what brings blessings to us.

Four years ago the Pew Research Center published a report with the title, *The World's Most Committed Christians Live In Africa*. In Nigeria and Zambia – two countries in which WELS does Gospel Outreach – 89% and 85% of Christians attend worship AT LEAST once a week. Why? Because in his first letter, the Apostle Peter encourages, "Like newborn babies, CRAVE PURE SPIRITUAL MILK, so that by it, you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). Praise the Lord

for their faithfulness! Pray to the Lord that he would lead us to be MORE LIKE THEM – to treasure the opportunities we have to hear about his love for us in Christ EVERY SUNDAY.

The Latest From WELS

There are 162 vacancies in pastoral positions, with 141 of those being vacancies in congregations.

The graduating class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary will number only in the mid-20s, which means that the shortage of pastors will continue. Next year's class numbers in the 40s, which should provide some relief a year from now. Call Day is on Ascension Day, Thursday, May 26 with Graduation taking place on Friday, May 27.

Teacher vacancies number in the 300s. After the assignment of teachers at Martin Luther College (MLC) in May, nearly 200 teacher vacancies will remain. The district presidents will be working with congregations to find ways to fill those vacancies before school starts in the fall. Graduation and Call Day will be on Saturday, May 14.

The WELS Conference of (District) Presidents plans to distribute a final draft of its document *God's Beautiful and Balanced Design for Male and Female* for discussion in late summer or early fall.

Each of the WELS' twelve districts will have a district convention this summer. The Minnesota District Convention will take place June 7-9 at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota.

Area WELS Update

Zion Lutheran Church of Hokah and
Immanuel Lutheran Church of South Ridge
will be celebrating their

150th Anniversary

of their founding on Sunday, June 26:

- 8:30 AM at Zion in Hokah
- 10:30 AM at Immanuel on South Ridge
- 12:15 meal – RSVP to Jenny at djwalter@acegroup.cc



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

The Martin Luther
College Wind Symphony
will be at First Lutheran in
La Crosse in their 8:00
and 10:15 worship
services on
Sunday, May 15.

Pastor Andrew Franz recently accepted a call to serve **Grace Lutheran** in **La Crosse**. He will be installed on May 15.

The pastoral vacancy at **St. John's** in **Nodine** continues. **Pastor Andrew Lindke** recently returned his call to St. John's. I continue to serve St. John's, largely with the help of other pastors in the area.

Other vacancies remain: 1) **St. Matthew's** in **Winona**, 2 & 3) two vacancies in **Rochester**, 4) **Good Shepherd** in **Holmen**. Please keep these congregations – and the men who serve them – in your prayers.

Pastor Brian Kom who served as First Lutheran's vacancy pastor after Pastor Christianson has received a call to serve Our Savior Lutheran Church in Grafton, Wisconsin

Upcoming WELS Events



Saturday, June 21 at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin

Watch a video about it [HERE](#)

Learn more and register [HERE](#)

The 59th Annual Convention of the **Lutheran Women's Missionary Society** (LWMS) will take place in Rochester, New York June 23-26

Learn more about this group [HERE](#)



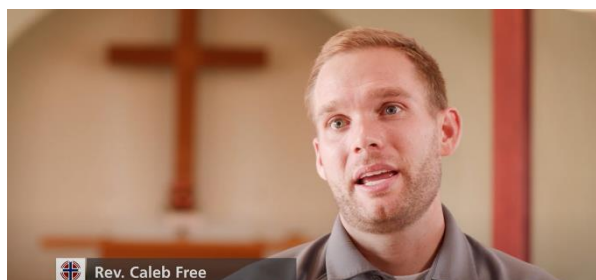
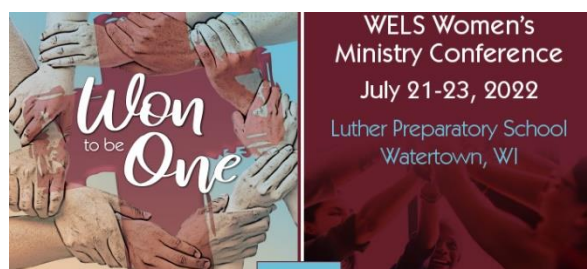
2022 WELS Night with the Brewers will be on Friday, July 8

Order tickets [HERE](#)



2022 WELS Women's Ministry Conference will take place at Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin July 21-23

Learn more and/or register [HERE](#)



Check out the **April WELS Connection** [HERE](#)

Or episodes you have missed [HERE](#)

Learn about the 60+ years and support of the work of the **Central Africa Medical Mission (CAMM)** [HERE](#)



Board For Lay Ministry Update

1. **Finances** – \$59,007 in INCOME through March MINUS \$65,696 in EXPENSES leaves us with a year-to-date DEFICIT of \$6,689.
2. **Altar Area** – ever since the altar was moved from the back wall of the church a number of years ago, there has been an *awkward step* in the altar area on which altar team members and pastors have had mishaps and near mishaps. In May or June, this issue will be corrected as the entire top step of the altar area will be removed so there is just one level. You may notice the work in progress on one who two Sundays.
3. **Roof Fund** – Total gifts to-date are \$12,349, with a \$33,000 goal. We have been blessed with a gift that will be used to MATCH ROOF FUND DONATIONS that we receive in the first two weeks of May (or until this gift is finished). In other words if you give a donation of \$100, the roof fund will actually receive \$200. Please prayerfully consider how you can help with this project. And thanks for all your support!
4. **Hymnal** – at Sunday's congregational meeting, it was decided to purchase enough of the new WELS hymnals to put two in every pew – so in the future there will be two of the present red hymnals along with two of the new blue hymnals.
5. **Help Needed** – Saturday, May 7 – OUTDOOR CLEANUP DAY will be from 8:00 AM - 12:00 noon.

Confirmation

- Sunday, May 8 – the EXAMINATION of this year's confirmands will take place in our worship service
- Sunday, May 15 – the CONFIRMATION and FIRST COMMUNION of the confirmands will take place in our worship service

The Month Of May

Sunday Mornings – **CrossTalk** (grades 1-6) after worship on May 1 & 8 ONLY
Bible Study after worship on May 8 & 22 ONLY

Mondays – **Bible Study** – *Great Chapters of the Bible* @ 9:00 AM
Evening Worship @ 6:30 PM

Wednesdays – **7th and 8th Grade Confirmation Class** – last class, on May 4 @ 6:30 PM
Choir will practice at 7:00 PM

Thursdays – **Women of the Word (WOW)** will meet on May 12 & 26 at 6:30 PM
Men's Bible Study will meet on May 19 @ 6:30 PM

Saturday – **First Women** will meet on Saturday, May 14 at 10:00 AM

Board for Lay Ministry – will meet on Monday, May 16, after the evening worship service

ELC Business Team – will meet on Tuesday, May 17 at 6:30 PM