

ELS Newsletter

Colloquies

On Feb. 23, the ELS Colloquy Committee (Pres. Hartwig, Prof. Rank, Rev. Soule, Dr. Dave Reagles, Mr. John Merseth, VP Smith & Pres. Obenberger) met with Revs. Steven Gjerde and Christopher Johnson who serve Zion Lutheran Church, Wausau, Wisconsin, which has left the LCMC and voted to join the ELS. It was a unanimous decision on the part of the Committee that both of these pastors successfully completed Part 1 of our colloquy process. It was a joy to hear in their separate sessions their clear and faithful confession of Christ's teachings. In a few weeks we will schedule part 2.

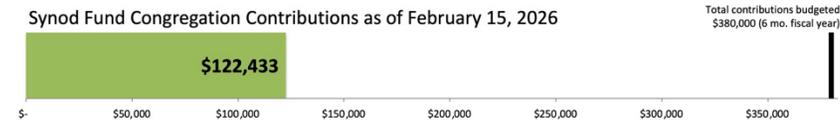
Changes in India

The Board for World Outreach has made the difficult decision to cease its relationship with the leadership of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation-Hyderabad, India. An effort is being made to contact other pastors in the Hyderabad district to determine if there are opportunities to continue supporting them.

Our relationship with Lutheran Mission of Salvation India, based in Rajahmundry, India continues with our full confidence, support and prayers. Please see the recent *Mission News* to learn about the flourishing work being done in the congregations, orphanages and school in and around Rajahmundry.

Upcoming Events

March 15 – BORAM report deadline
April 5 – Easter Sunday
April 28–29 – Board for World Outreach



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Because of our relatively small size as a synod, we do not have much in the way of a bureaucracy. Therefore we are dependent on the work of many volunteers, clergy and laity alike, to oversee the work we have decided to do together. Occasionally I hear that there are some who complain about sharing their pastor's time doing synodical work. We recognize that such additional work can appear to lessen a pastor's time both with his family but also with his parish. We trust that those pastors elected to positions on boards and committees, etc. will manage their time well, so that the sacrifices made by family and parish will be both minimal and beneficial.

However, I have experienced and have heard from others that while it cannot be measured, the time spent on synodical work actually enhances the pastor's work in the parish. I saw it when I served on the Board for Home Missions, as Circuit Visitor, and as the synod's Vice President. We come to expect that fathers and mothers will add on volunteer vocations that are beneficial in many ways: volunteer firefighters and other emergency responders, coaches, FFA chaperones, etc. So good churchmen/women will manage their expectations of their pastors realizing that the vital work we do together as a synod depends on such labor and expertise. Both clergy and laymen who do volunteer service for the ELS must always manage their time well for all their God-given vocations. In the end, for all Christians, we seek to glorify our Savior in all the vocations He has bestowed upon us supporting the Gospel proclamation near and far. Be willing to share your pastor's talents, skills and abilities for the sake of the Church at large. If you have acted selfishly in this regard, know that there is forgiveness from the Lord. You are then set free to support your pastor in such necessary service.

Glenn Obenberger

Expanding Graduate Education at Bethany Lutheran College

The Bethany Lutheran College Board of Regents has approved the college's second graduate program, a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership. The fully online program will offer three tracks and feature eight-week course formats, enabling students to complete the degree in as little as one calendar year. This action builds on the success of Bethany's first graduate program, the Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, now in its fifth year of serving students pursuing a counseling degree with a Christian emphasis. The Organizational Leadership program will next seek accreditation approval from the Higher Learning Commission prior to an anticipated Fall 2027 launch. In addition, the board authorized new undergraduate minors in theatre and American history.

Installation

The Rev. Larry Wentzloff was installed as the Congregational Counselor on Friday, February 13. President Obenberger conducted the installation and Rev. Sam Gullixson preached the sermon in a service that was held in Good Shepherd Chapel at the Synod/Seminary building.

Rev. Wentzloff is available to help assess and counsel congregations that are at critical mass.



Pictured (left to right) Board for Home Outreach members Neil Shaffer, Luke Ulrich, Dean Shoop, Noah Thompson, Congregational Counselor Larry Wentzloff, Brad Kerkow, Mark Perlwitz, Ben Wiechmann, Sam Gullixson

A Lutheran Military Ministry Conference

On Monday, Feb. 16, on the BLC campus a Lutheran Military Ministry Conference was hosted by the ELS Board of Christian Service (BCS). Two members each from the ELS BCS, Lutheran Military Support Group, WELS Military Services, and LCMS Military Ministry were the participants. They met outside the framework of fellowship to become familiar with each other's military ministry and to provide encouragement and support to each other for the benefit of Lutheran military members and their families (active duty and veterans). The overall goal was to share ideas and perhaps find areas of cooperating in externals. There are plans to meet again in Jan./Feb. 2027 via zoom and perhaps with additional participants.



Synod and BLC Finances

At the 2025 ELS Convention a regular update on the financial position of the synod and our college was requested from the office of the president (cf. *Synod Report 2025*: p. 77, Res. 1). The ELS financial state is strong. While the 2025 figures are still preliminary, a guesstimate is that the ELS experienced an overall increase of income, so that we may have over \$30M in reserve funds at this time. Much of these funds are restricted in their use by donors or boards. Our newly assembled and reorganized Planning and Coordinating Committee along with the Treasurer are giving attention to identifying for all our boards and committees what funds they have available for use in their specific areas of responsibility. An area of concern for the synod is congregational giving, which has fallen short of the convention approved budget the last two years. These unrestricted dollars give the synod the capacity to address emerging issues and opportunities in real time. Bethany continues to receive strong financial contributions from alumni, constituents, and ELS congregations. Through January 2026, both the Bethany Fund (annual) giving and new scholarship endowment support have reached 70% of their respective fiscal year goals. Overall, financial support has trended upward in recent years. Our college is projecting a third consecutive year with a balanced operating budget. Challenges still remain with potential decreases in enrollment and in government grants to students, but we remain optimistic while trusting in the Lord's continued blessings.