

**TOGETHER**



January 19, 2021

## Encouraging financial results from 2020

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**W**e have great news to celebrate. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) submitted by congregations to the synod in December totaled \$3.45 million, which was an increase from the previous December of 1.5%, or \$50,328. For the entire year of 2020, CMO totaled \$21.7 million, an increase of 2.3% (\$498,000) from the prior year and \$633,000 higher than the 2% increase that was projected. The 2021 CMO totals were the highest in history, eclipsing the previous high in 2008.

This blessing is especially amazing because it took place in a year when congregational worship was severely disrupted and the economy significantly impacted by COVID-19. Our thanks to God for his gracious providence and to the faithful way, motivated by the gospel, in which congregations and their members did not let a crisis get in the way of their support for the mission and ministry of our synod.

The synod's financial situation is in very good shape, thanks to the generous gifts of God's people and to the reduction in expenditures that resulted from less travel and fewer meetings. We pray that we will see similar blessings in the new year. And we continue to sing with the psalmist, "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness" (Psalm 115:1).

The CMO 2021 subscription reporting process is well underway. The deadline for submitting CMO 2021 commitments is Fri., Feb. 5, at noon (Central). Thank you, in advance, for encouraging your congregations to record their commitments (along with 2020 statistics) by that date! ☪

Serving with you in Christ,  
**WELS President Mark Schroeder**

## Mission congregations offer aid during the pandemic

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**W**ELS Christian Aid and Relief and WELS Home Missions have teamed up to offer more than \$160,000 in pandemic relief matching grants to 24 mission congregations that are offering aid to those in their communities who are struggling. Grants were allocated in January.

“Our mission is to relieve suffering, to reach out to those who have been hit hard by something and help them through it, while we reflect the love of Jesus and gain opportunities to share the good news of Jesus as their Savior,” says Rev. Daniel Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. “It’s easy to look at the pandemic as a problem—and it is—but it’s also a tremendous opportunity to do exactly what our mission is set to do.”

These home missions were creative with their ideas, offering plans to provide food and supplies to families in need and counseling and support groups for those struggling with their mental health. Many are partnering with other community organizations, working closely with local homeless shelters and schools in their area.

Hope in the Heights, Houston, Texas, a home mission that started in 2019, is supporting its local Chamber of Commerce’s Adopt-a-Teacher program, which provides teachers with needed supplies,

personal gifts, support, and prayers during these trying times. “With all the stress that teachers have been under, we thought it would be a nice thing to help them out,” says Mr. Mark Hartman, a lay member at Hope. The congregation decided to support teachers from two of the schools in the congregation’s target area.

Besides helping the teachers, Hope asked each teacher to nominate two families who are struggling because of the pandemic so that Hope could provide groceries to those families.

Hope was so excited about the program that it decided to get started even before the grant money came through. “I just bought groceries for our 18th family since we started [last November],” says Hartman. “We’re glad this grant program came up—not only for the resources—but just to spur us on to come up with an idea to help our community.”

He continues, “When a program like this comes along, it gives you the opportunity to say, ‘I don’t have to worry about my budget, I can just go and bless these people in my community.’”

And people are appreciative of that help. One local elementary teacher e-mailed, saying, “I have had the pleasure of hearing the cheerful stories from my students that you purchased groceries for. I wish you could see the look on their faces! I wanted to thank you for

your generosity and kindness. This is definitely what this world needs more of.” Another said, “I am truly humbled and blessed that a church and its congregation wanted to help teachers—and especially me.”

Learn more about Christian Aid and Relief at [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief). Learn more about Home Missions at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions). 🌐

## God's blessings on display

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“Your gifts, God's blessings: An annual report to our members” is now available online. The report includes photos of Christian brothers and sisters around the world, stories of faith, and updates on WELS' ministry.

“Despite the challenges, disruptions, and distractions of the past year, God enabled our congregations to preach the saving gospel and find creative ways to worship,” notes WELS President Mark Schroeder.

Learn more about

- Jordan Massiah, a student studying in the pastor track at Martin Luther College, who preached a sermon for chapel that was streamed online and shared via social media during spring 2020;
- Sure Foundation, Brandon, S.D., a home mission congregation that partnered with an area gym to include Bible-based vid-


eos as part of the gym's 21-Day Transformation program;

- Haris, a student in WELS' Pastoral Studies Institute, who reached out to the Muslims in his community with face masks and groceries to show them the love of Christ; and
- *The Christian Service Members' Handbook*, developed to help those in the military stay strong in their faith in places where a pastor or fellow believer might not be available.

These stories and more are presented in the 2021 edition of “Your gifts, God's blessings.” As Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, says, it “provides a meaningful review of the many ways that the Lord Jesus uses the offerings, prayers, and volunteer service of WELS members to share his good news with precious souls in North America and around the world. Such a review is beneficial in light of the significant Congregation Mission Offerings (\$21.7 million) and special gifts that WELS received in 2020.”

Print versions of the report have been sent to every WELS congregation and individual donor. Additional print versions are available from Northwestern Publishing House for free. Visit [nph.net](http://nph.net) or call 800-662-6022.

To view the report online, visit [wels.net/annualreport](http://wels.net/annualreport). There you can also download a PowerPoint presentation of the report with notes that allow anyone to share

the highlights of our synod's work. Alternatively, churches can invite a WELS Christian giving counselor to give the presentation. Contact WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for more information. 

## Building a congregation's outreach culture

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**T**he Commission on Evangelism has developed a new program called Everyone Outreach to help focus congregations and their members on Jesus' command to make disciples.

"If you look at WELS churches that are growing, the main ingredient is that they have an outreach culture," says Rev. Eric Roecker, director of WELS Evangelism. "The idea of this program is to create that culture so that every member and every ministry are focused on reaching the lost. Then it becomes clear that outreach is not an afterthought or something the evangelism committee does. It is who we are and what we do."

This personal witnessing mindset is important in post-Christian America. "People who aren't interested in Christianity in any way aren't going to be reached by corporate outreach for the most part," says Roecker. "It's going to take each of us showing love to our unchurched friends and neighbors and then looking for opportunities to lead them to

the gospel."

Roecker is quick to point out that Everyone Outreach is not going to train people how to do outreach. Instead it is designed to help a congregation discover its thought habits and develop new thinking and behaviors that build a culture of outreach.

The program begins with a two-day workshop at the congregation, where facilitators will use group exercises and reflection, grounded in God's Word, to explore and adjust the congregation's culture.

But it isn't just a one-and-done experience for the congregation. Attendees will leave with an outreach partner and their own personal commitment statements for accountability and encouragement. The program also will provide ongoing support through e-mails, text messages, meeting starters, and sermon thoughts, which will reinforce the changes that were discussed in the workshop.

The commission has worked closely with Mr. Kurt Nitz, a lay member at Christ Our Savior, Rockford, Mich., and an expert on culture transformations, to put together the program. This spring, 40 pastors will be trained to facilitate the workshops, with the plan to start offering workshops to congregations this fall.

Learn more about Everyone Outreach at [everyoneoutreach.com](http://everyoneoutreach.com).



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Christ's Love. Our Calling.

To sign up for the e-mail version, visit [wels.net/together](http://wels.net/together).