

MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE INFOCUS

FALL 2023



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On the cover:

A few members of MLC's dorm staff, which welcomed the new students to campus in August

Christ's Gifts Beautifully Measured into Our Lives



By President Rich Gurgel
NWC '81, WLS '86

"Do the last two decades of my ministry still matter?"

It was a question on my mind in 2020 as I left behind 22 years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) and began service at Martin Luther College (MLC). I sought to trust that God is the perfect steward of our entire lives. He wastes nothing. That assured me that 22 years at WLS—teaching homiletics (preaching) and Christian doctrine, and serving as WLS's continuing education director—weren't suddenly irrelevant to ministry on a different campus.

But it wasn't immediately apparent what that relevance would be as I left Mequon and was swept up into the myriad details of being a full-time administrator at MLC in New Ulm. At times it seemed I'd entered an entirely new world. There were countless new acronyms to learn, from PELSB (Minnesota's Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board) to HLC (the Higher Learning Commission, MLC's accrediting agency) to DIRE (the director of institutional research and effectiveness).

Dorothy's words in *The Wizard of Oz* came to mind: "We're not in Kansas [Mequon] anymore, Toto!"

Yet, through the transition, I tried to remember the advice often given to basketball players partnering with a new team: "Don't force any shots. Let the game come to you."

Now, entering my fourth year, God has allowed the game to come to me in some wonderful ways!

- **Encouragement in Devotional Life:** I spent much of my last 10 years at seminary helping seniors and pastors find greater joy in approaching their devotional lives with a clear gospel focus. Well, I've now had the opportunity to provide that encouragement to over 300 MLC students—and some faculty and staff are asking when their presentation will be!
- **Encouragement in Preaching:** I spent 22 years teaching seminary students the beauty of Christ-centered preaching that draws insights on proclaiming law and gospel directly from the unique imagery the Spirit imbeds in each text. Now, in partnership with MLC's new dean of chapel, I've had the privilege of offering those same encouragements to those who lead MLC's morning chapel.
- **Encouragement in Stewardship of Gifts:** Here's one I'd like to underline for this article. I spent 10 years at WLS using CliftonStrengths—an inventory 30 million people worldwide have taken to understand their strengths—to help seminary seniors, and some faculty and staff, to ponder how God uniquely wired them for service in their godly callings in life. The seminary even invested in the training I needed to become a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach. At MLC, I've had the opportunity to put that training to work with 70 (and counting) individual meetings with MLC faculty and staff. And this year, 75 education and staff ministry seniors have signed up for that same opportunity.

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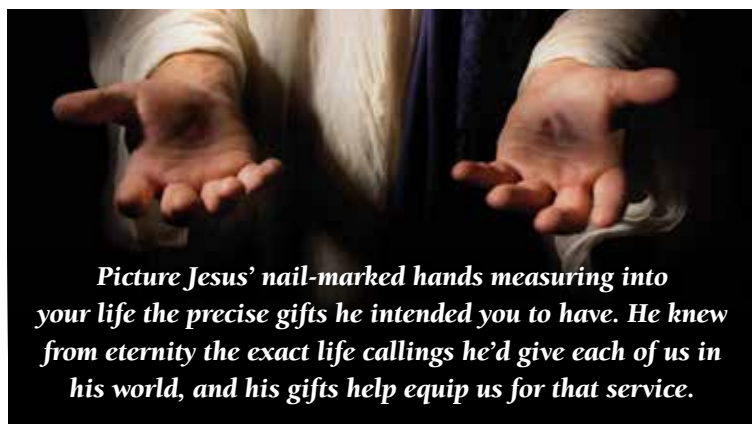
Comments are welcomed and should be directed to gaugerlf@mlc-wels.edu or Laurie Gauger, MLC InFocus, 1995 Luther Court, New Ulm MN 56073.

The mission of MLC is to train men and women to meet the public ministry needs of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.



Those individual meetings have shown me repeatedly, very concretely, the beauty of God's promise from Ephesians 4:7: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." The word translated *apportioned* literally means *measured*. Picture Jesus' nail-marked hands measuring into your life—and into the life of every believer—the precise gifts he intended you to have. He knew from eternity the exact life callings he'd give each of us in his world, and his gifts help equip us for that service. His measuring was as purposeful as it was graceful!

Can any human inventory—such as CliftonStrengths—perfectly measure that? Certainly not. We're far too "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) by God for any human inventory to capture. But such an inventory can provide some insight into Jesus' purposeful and graceful gifting.



Picture Jesus' nail-marked hands measuring into your life the precise gifts he intended you to have. He knew from eternity the exact life callings he'd give each of us in his world, and his gifts help equip us for that service.

That's why, as we meet, I seek to help each MLC student, staff, or faculty member to see something bigger than the human inventory—to see their Savior's nail-marked hands measuring into each of their lives gifts for service in his saving name. To use the wording of our MLC strategic plan, the meetings are intended to help each student, staff, and faculty member to ponder how their unique God-given gifts enable them, in each of their unique God-given vocations, to **Pursue Excellence Under the Cross**.



Pursuing Excellence
UNDER THE CROSS

As you read the rest of this edition of **InFocus**, keep in mind that picture of Jesus' nail-marked hands measuring into the lives of each one on our campus—and into your life off campus!—the precise set of gifts he intended us to have.

As you read each story, may I offer a tagline for each story? It's this: **Christ's Gifts Beautifully Measured into Our Lives.**

The alumni photos at the bottom of the pages are from the anniversary classes of MLC, NWC, and DMLC: '49, '54, '59, '64, '69, '74, '79, '84, '89, '94, '99, '04, '09, '14, and '19. Thanks to Copy Editor Heidi Schoof DMLC '86, who provided this random selection of alumni.



**Amelia
Nemmers**
MLC 2014
Allen TX



**Ken
Brokmeier**
NWC 1984
Fort Atkinson WI



Devotions for Your Advent Preparations

This Advent we invite you to explore the mysteries surrounding Christ's birth in *The Mysteries of Christmas: Many Millennia, Many Mysteries, One Messiah*.

The coming of Jesus has always been shrouded in mystery. In his first coming, as a baby in Bethlehem, thousands of years of mysterious promises were resolved and realized—and not always in ways God's people expected.

His second coming—at the End of All Things—is also shrouded in mystery. No one even knows the day or hour he'll reappear.

Join us this Advent for 25 meditations that explore these mysteries.

The print copies have already been distributed, but you can read the devotions online beginning December 1. Or request that we send them to your personal email on a daily basis, December 1-25.



Admissions:

Encouraging Students to Say "Here Am I" to Ministry Training

About 135 new first-year students were greeted by our enthusiastic Admissions Office staff on Orientation weekend. They are (from left) **Martín Santos** MLC '17, **Joel Thomford** NWC '84, **WLS '88**, **Hannah Scharf** MLC '02, **Alyssa Heckendorf** MLC '23, **VP for Enrollment Management Ted Klug** MLC '97, '18, and **Lori Unke** DMLC '84. Not pictured: **Administrative Assistant Wendy Ristow** DMLC '82.



This year the counselors will once again visit all the Lutheran high schools and prep schools, as well as some elementary schools, and they'll welcome hundreds of high schoolers for on-campus Focus on Ministry visits. The counselors give personal attention to each student, helping them discover their gifts and explore ways to use them in God's kingdom.

Fall 2023 By the Numbers

620 Undergraduate enrollment

465 Education/Staff ministry majors

155 Preseminary majors

27 States represented in student body

5 Countries represented in student body

3.65 average GPA of first-year class

24.5 average ACT of first-year class

133 Graduate Studies enrollment

1,145 Grad Studies & Continuing Ed enrollment (numbers currently available are from 2022-23)

Great Financial News for Students!



The financial future is looking brighter and brighter for MLC students.

The numbers are in, and we can report that for *five straight years*, our graduates borrowed less money to pay for their education at MLC.

The average debt decreased five years in a row, with the 2023 graduating class borrowing \$841 less, on average, than borrowers in the class of 2022.

Over the course of those five years, the average debt has decreased almost \$4,000!

In addition, 1 out of 3 graduates in 2023 borrowed no money at all. They are leaving MLC debt-free.

Reducing student debt is one of the primary objectives in our strategic plan, *Pursuing Excellence Under the Cross*. Please know that we'll keep working hard to boost our financial aid and keep our costs in check. We want to work with families to make students' financial burdens as light as possible.

As those debt numbers keep going down, the future keeps looking up!



Douglas Free
NWC 1979
Omaha NE



Nancy Seymour
MLC 2004
Hayward WI



Philip Koeninger
NWC 1969
Plymouth MI



Karen Koepsell
DMLC 1969
Pardeeville WI

Recruiting the Next Generation— *Starting in Grade School!*

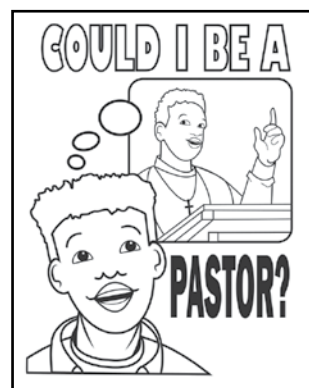
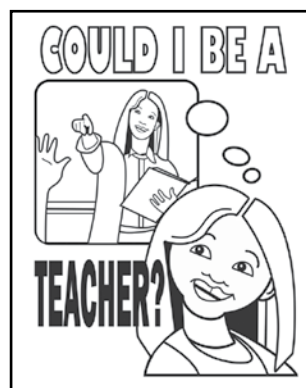


Many Lutheran elementary schools are using our K-8 Project Elijah curriculum material, including brand-new coloring books created by **Peter Schaewe** DMLC '87: *Could I Be a Pastor?* and *Could I Be a Teacher?*



Parents and teachers, we'd encourage you to scan the QR code and choose a recruitment activity for your kids!

We're all recruiters for ministry!



Seminary Students *as Recruiters*

2023 is seeing an exciting development in MLC Admissions. Two MLC graduates who are now students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have joined our team on a part-time basis: **Ezra Blumer** MLC '23 and **Seth Hackbarth** MLC '23.

After these young men finish up their Greek homework at the seminary, they head out to meet with students at one of eight nearby high schools: Kettle Moraine LHS, Kingdom Prep, Lakeside LHS, Luther Prep, Manitowoc LHS, Shoreland LHS, Winnebago Lutheran Academy, and Wisconsin LHS.

As they talk to students, they share the story of how Christ's gifts have been beautifully measured out into their lives—and how they're responding.



Ezra (*pictured left*) admits that MLC was not his first choice. "I attended the University of Minnesota for a year, pursuing a career in high-level coaching for basketball. Then God placed on my heart a desire for ministry."

Ezra encourages high school students to ask themselves one question: "How do you want to use your short time on this earth to serve the kingdom?" He says, "The question should not be 'How can we live it up while here on this earth?' Instead, it's more worthwhile to take inventory of the gifts and talents God has given you and then consider how you can best use those gifts to make a difference for the kingdom."



The ministry was not Seth's (*pictured left*) first choice either. At the top of his list were the military, accounting, and engineering. "Being a pastor was at the back of that list," he says, "but from little bits of encouragement I received, I decided to try out MLC. I've now realized how great a blessing it is to enter the ministry—the blessing of sharing the peace I have daily from God's promises with others."



Christian Kock
NWC 1959
St. Paul MN



Rachel Hartmann
MLC 2019
Germantown WI



Joseph Radsek
NWC 1989
Potosi WI



Sarah Meyer
MLC 1999
Milwaukee

Preserving the Trust

First Annual Senior Retreat

Our senior education and staff ministry students are already excited about Call Day, May 18, when they'll learn where they will begin their ministries. We want to be sure they're ready—not only for the expected joys and blessings of ministry, but also for the unexpected pressures and challenges that may come. That's why 97 seniors gathered for an off-campus retreat in August to explore some foundational life skills.

This first annual "Preserving the Trust" retreat was grounded in the apostle Paul's words to Timothy: "Guard what has been entrusted to your care" (1 Timothy 6:20).

President Rich Gurgel explains: "God has poured all these wonderful things into each of us as a trust—foremost of which is the gospel, and then our unique gifts and talents, our relationships with the people surrounding us, and our physical health to carry all of that. Now we want to preserve that trust."

Dean of Education **Ben Clemons** MLC '03 and New Teacher Induction Coordinator **Jon Schaefer** MLC '02 assisted the president in organizing the retreat. They explained that what they've witnessed over the past several years demonstrates the need for newer called workers to "preserve the trust" by developing stronger resilience in the face of challenges. They've seen increased stress, anxiety, and depression among undergraduate MLC students as well as a sharp increase in new teacher resignations due to anxiety and exhaustion.

The retreat, created with the help of generous grants from the Antioch II Foundation and Grace in Action, was set

up to proactively address these trends with godly encouragement, tools, and strategies.

So, over a Saturday and Sunday at a comfortable hotel in Bloomington MN, the seniors listened, reflected, and interacted with topics related to maintaining physical health, improving emotional and relational health, discovering and using their unique set of gifts—using CliftonStrengths—and developing a robust personal devotional life.

Five presenters got them thinking:

THE POWER OF HABITS

(Understanding the importance of keystone habits)

Presented by **Greg Schmill**, DMLC '80, Grace in Action

LIFE MANAGEMENT

(Locking in healthy emotional and physical habits)

Presented by Greg Schmill, Grace in Action

GROWTH IN MINISTRY

(Learning from experiences as first-year called workers)

Presented by **Paul Patterson**, DMLC '95,
WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

(Building honest and loving relationships in ministry)

Presented by **Dave Gartner**, DMLC '92, West LHS

SPIRITUAL CARE PLAN

(Pondering the Word in personal devotion time)

Presented by **Rich Gurgel**, NWC '81, WLS '86,
Martin Luther College



**Elizabeth
Ibisch**
MLC 2004
Wauwatosa WI



**Ronald
Sieggreen**
DMLC 1974
Saginaw MI



**Jessica
Niemi**
MLC 2009
La Crosse WI



**Brian
Westgate**
MLC 2004
Blissfield MI



They also received a full 34 CliftonStrengths Report to help them identify their unique strengths and how they can put them to work in their ministries.

The students left with personal plans—nourishing routines, healthy habits, and positive mindsets—that they could put to use immediately during their upcoming student teaching or staff ministry internships, and then carry with them into their first years of ministry.

Most importantly, they left with the foundational truth that their identity is found in Christ, and only through Christ can they find the strength and resilience that will daily carry them.

To these future teachers and staff ministers standing at the cusp of their ministries, President Gurgel says, “We’ve trained you for ministry. Now we want you to hold onto everything God has invested in you. With these tools and with Jesus’ grace, we want you to preserve the trust.”

The Shepherd Society

Nominate a called worker who has made a difference!

Founded in 2008, the Shepherd Society is comprised of called workers who’ve been recognized for making a difference in people’s lives through their ministries.

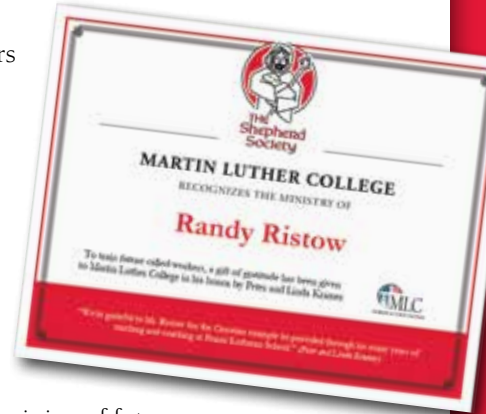
Anyone may nominate a pastor, teacher, or staff minister for the Shepherd Society by filling out an easy form and sending it to Martin Luther College along with a gift of gratitude (\$250 minimum).

In so doing, the donors support the training of future called workers at MLC. At the same time, they express their gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and to the specific called worker who has shepherded them in a special way.

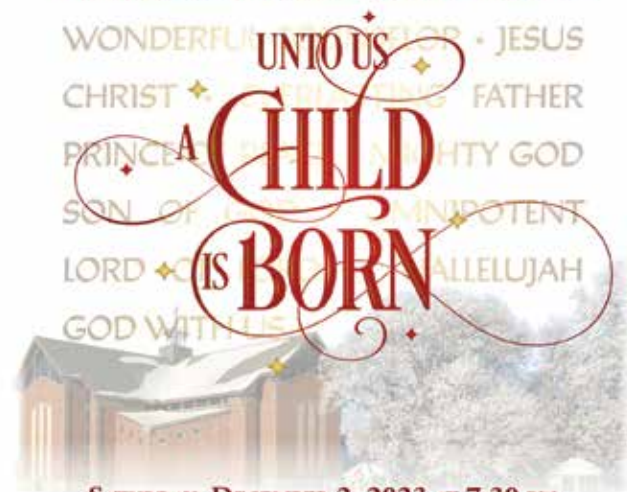
The called workers nominated for the Shepherd Society receive a commemorative plaque and a personal letter from the MLC president.



To see the full list of Shepherd Society members—or to nominate a pastor, teacher, or staff minister for the Shepherd Society—go to mlc-wels.edu/go/shepherd-society.



CHRISTMAS AT MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2023 AT 7:30 PM

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2023 AT 4:00 PM

CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST



Emily Mayer
MLC 2009
Mukwonago WI



Charles Papenfuss
NWC 1974
Dakota MN



Marianne Albrecht
DMLC 1959
New Ulm MN



Kurt Herrel
MLC 1999
Haven KS

CDA Prep Series

New Support for EC Teachers and Aides

Thousands of little children are learning, playing, *and hearing the gospel* at 363 early childhood ministries across the synod.

The teachers and aides at these preschools and early childhood centers have hearts full of love for these children, but many of them are new to the field of early childhood education. They are seeking more professional training and the professional credential that parents want to see.

But they don't want to stop serving to enroll in full-time college courses. They want to be taught even as they keep teaching!

That's where MLC steps in. For many years, we've been offering the Early Childhood Educator Series, a series of 1-credit courses designed to provide current early childhood teachers with an understanding of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood, especially as it applies to a Lutheran ministry context.

The courses also prepared teachers to apply for their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. CDA, recognized in all 50 states, is considered the best first step in early childhood credentialing.

For those teachers and aides who came to this ministry with little experience—like Denise Ball, *pictured right*—the Early Childhood Educator Series was just what they needed.

Now, in our continuing effort to serve these Christ-centered servants, MLC has streamlined the Early Childhood Educator Series. We're calling our new and improved curriculum the CDA Prep Series.



Denise Ball, *pictured with her preschool class several years ago*, leveraged her degree in computer science and business from Texas A & M Commerce to work in several corporate jobs, and then traded in her biweekly meetings for Bible story time. She's been teaching preschool at Calvary in Dallas since 2014.

MLC's 1-credit courses gave her the background she needed and prepared her to get her CDA credential—all while she was teaching at Calvary.

"I take away so much from these courses," she said at the time, "not just because of the content, but by the way these instructors present the material for real application."

Now, in MLC's new CDA Prep Series, the coursework to prepare for credentialing is even easier.



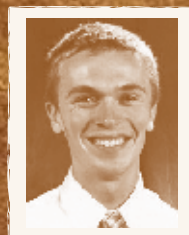
**More about the
CDA Prep Series**



**David
Pingel**
DMLC 1964
Appleton WI



**Anna
Ziel**
MLC 2019
Ixonia WI



**Jonathan
Bauer**
MLC 2009
New Ulm MN



**Dominique
Kiesling**
MLC 2004
Saint Francis MN

The CDA Prep Series

The CDA Prep Series is comprised of three online courses, five weeks each, targeted specifically at preparing teachers and aides for their CDA credential. The courses are taught by retired WELS early childhood director and teacher Peggy Witt (*Martin Luther-St. Louis*).

In just 15 weeks—one semester—an early childhood educator can be immersed in the foundations of a Lutheran early childhood ministry *and* the eight subject-area standards required by CDA:

- Planning a safe and healthy learning environment
- Advancing children's physical and intellectual development
- Supporting children's social and emotional development
- Building productive relationships with families
- Managing an effective program operation
- Maintaining a commitment to professionalism
- Observing and recording children's behavior
- Understanding the principles of child development and learning

The one-semester series also helps the educators create their portfolio, prepare for CDA's written exam, and apply for the credential. One spring or one fall—and the process can be done!

We know that Christ has beautifully measured out special gifts to these teachers and aides: love for him, a teacher's heart, and a special rapport with little children. Our CDA Prep Series augments those gifts with the essential skills and knowledge they need in their profession as early childhood educators in our WELS ministries.

Are you or any members of your early childhood staff interested in the CDA Prep Series? **Apply to MLC**, and we'll send you the textbook and the CDA standards book, which are required for the courses.



**Apply for the
CDA Prep Series**



If you have any questions, please contact **Dr. John Meyer** DMLC '87, director of Graduate Studies and Continuing Education, at meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu or 507.354.8221 x398.



**Robert
Beaver**
MLC 2019
Oconomowoc WI



**Deborah
Braun**
MLC 2004
Livingston MT



**Rollin
Timm**
DMLC 1984
Wood Lake MN



**Rachel
Mittelstadt**
DMLC 1994
Largo MD



The Story of a Special Services

When **Holly (Pearson) Dannecker** MLC '09 earned her MS-Education from MLC this spring, it was the culmination of an interesting story—a story with a few surprising twists.

The first twist took place before Dannecker even began grad school. Although she started her ministry as an elementary teacher, she is now a full-time special education teacher. Her assignment call was to St. John in Sparta, Wisconsin, where she taught in several classrooms, K-4, over the course of a decade, and helped start the early childhood center (now called Bright Beginnings). But she had a heart for the children with special needs, so she began serving part-time as St. John's extended learning director. In 2019, she accepted a call to St. Mark-Green Bay, Wisconsin, where she taught grade 4 and served as director of Student Services. This year, she began a ministry at Mount Olive-Appleton, Wisconsin, as full-time director of Student Services.

What does she do as a director of Student Services? Dannecker says the overarching goal is “to make sure all children have equitable access to tools that help them thrive in a learning environment.” To accomplish that, she supports and educates classroom teachers, works collaboratively with the public school district, communicates with parents, and instructs children with exceptional needs.

Stepping into the role of special ed teacher led Dannecker to realize how much she needed to learn. “I recognized that I still didn't know much about best practices, how to identify credible research, and good leadership traits,” she said.

She took a few graduate courses at other colleges, but then she enrolled in MLC's program. “I chose MLC for my graduate program because I felt the quality was better than other institutions I attended. Alternative programs also charged much more tuition, yet I often thought I was teaching myself with no apparent purpose behind the assignments.”

The second twist in this story occurred when Dannecker chose her emphasis. Of MLC's four emphases—Instruction, Educational Technology, Special Ed, and Leadership—we would suppose she would choose Special Ed. But she did not. Instead, she opted for the Leadership emphasis. “While I teach special education,” she says, “my most important

task is to train educators to implement inclusive practices successfully. My goals were to become a better communicator with groups of people and to learn how to navigate the blessings and challenges of implementing change within a school. Credentials in special education *and* leadership play a vital role in my mission.”

She says that all the leadership courses were “astoundingly helpful.” But one course was especially valuable: Educational Leadership taught by **Dr. Daniel Johnson**, DMLC '88. That course, she says, “changed how I will approach things in my ministry forever.”

The third twist in this story is something that surprised Dannecker herself. “I was a bit naïve when I first enrolled in graduate studies, since I expected it to imitate my undergraduate experience. For example, I anticipated studying material that may not be relevant when I'm in the classroom or working in groups with one or more disengaged members.”

What she found, though, was that graduate studies was quite different—in positive ways. “I didn't encounter irrelevant activities, and most often the activities were astoundingly timely in my stage of ministry. For instance, one exercise required our groups to evaluate credible vs. non-credible research. At the same time, I was working with an institution trying to discredit the data our school had collected to help a family through a challenging situation. Thanks to what I learned in my classes the week before, I could justify our data as valid and not be discredited.”



Jonathan Lorenz
MLC 1999
Indianapolis



Rebecca Hussman
MLC 2014
Greenville WI



Steven Abramowski
MLC 2004
Knoxville TN



Rylee Weisensel
MLC 2019
New Ulm MN

Director—with a Few Twists

And as for those group projects, she was also pleasantly surprised. “I always experienced professional group members who worked hard and offered valuable insight. I was excited to meet some of them on graduation day.”

The growth Dannecker experienced was not only professional. It was spiritual too. “The hidden gem not written in each MLC course description is how much ministerial encouragement you will receive from your instructors.” And the spiritual encouragement comes from fellow grad students too: “When someone would share a traumatic and devastating event in their ministry, the prayers and compassionate responses offered by our instructors and classmates are something that I will never forget. Sometimes we feel like Elijah—‘the only one left’—but then God brings us together and reminds us we are still building his kingdom with many others.”

■ **The fourth twist** in this journey is the level of respect

Dannecker now receives in her local special education community. Having her special education license and her master’s degree in leadership has given her much more credibility with the public school system.

“There was a time,” she says, “when I wasn’t even allowed into meetings because I didn’t have the proper credentials. But now I am at the table at every meeting about students’ needs. Now I can ensure that all the students at our Lutheran school have access to the services they are entitled to. And that means that every student—even those with special needs—can attend our Lutheran school.”

That, essentially, is Holly Dannecker’s mission: “Having a Student Services program at our Lutheran school ensures equitable access to Christian education for every student . . . and special education for every student who needs it.”

Dannecker’s finals words are not a surprise at all. She encourages other teachers considering a graduate program to go for it—at MLC!

“First,” she says, “I want to commend the WELS churches and schools who are helping pay for coursework. For most called workers, we could not pursue higher education without the financial support of our congregations. Thank you for your offering of love.”

“Second, if you are reading this and debating whether to enroll, consider the blessings. Here are some:

- If you are licensed, your courses are credited to your clock hour count.
- If you are licensed in Wisconsin, your courses meet criteria toward your Lifetime License.
- A great deal of your work centers around group collaboration and experience. Anyone who loves to teach and enjoys learning will do well in these courses.
- The work is relevant. When it doesn’t appear relevant, your instructors help you recognize connections to your situation.
- Scripture reminds us that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. I have experienced many blessings from the work I put into this program.”



Meet Max!

We can’t leave the story of Dannecker’s ministry without introducing you to Max the therapy dog. Dannecker began training Max when she was serving in Sparta. Now, he’s certified through Living Creatures Ministry as a school therapy dog. He was onsite regularly at St. Mark in Green Bay, and he will soon be offering his special gifts at Mount Olive.

“Max has been a great catalyst for compassion ministry,” Dannecker says. “When Max is in the classroom, a child who has experienced severe trauma will open up. The world can sometimes be very bad, and some children have been deeply hurt. They won’t open up to adults, because they don’t trust us. But they will talk to Max.”

“There are places in people’s hearts that humans can’t touch,” she adds. “But a therapy dog like Max can make all the difference.”

About Holly Dannecker: “I have a husband, Jordan, and two daughters, Paige (10) and Evangeline (8), and two golden retrievers, Max and Tug. I love being outside with my girls and spending time at our family cabin in northern Minnesota. What you might never guess about me is that I have a knack for running into famous people. For example, my first weekend in Green Bay I spent 20 minutes sheltering from rain next to Green Bay Packer Jordy Nelson and his family at the zoo.”



Micah Plocher
MLC 2014
Vassar MI



Hannah Lange
MLC 2019
Bowling Green OH



Michael Kober
NWC 1994
Bay City MI



Muriel Frey
DMLC 1964
Phoenix

here on the
hill



Welcome!

Our resident assistants welcomed all our new students in August, lifting everyone's spirits—and their TVs, couches, and fridges too!



Summer Ministry

This summer **Grace Pocza** (*Good Shepherd-Burton MI, pictured*) and 50+ other MLC students traveled to two dozen congregations (like St. Paul-Beverly Hills FL, pictured here) to share Jesus' love and assist with camps, VBS, and worship!



Please Sign My Program!

What's better than your favorite Knight's autograph?



Joyful Service

Aaron Bush was one of seven new faculty installed at our opening service.



Come On In!

Students are loving the renovated Luther Student Center. A special bequest jumpstarted this project, and our own building and grounds staff did the construction.



MLC's Got Talent!

Students shone at our Homecoming Talent Show, which always ends with the packed auditorium singing the Common Doxology in harmony.



Chef's Kiss

Students stirred up a lot of deliciousness in our Homecoming Iron Chef contest.



Come for the Run, Stay for the Fun!

The Sprinter Fun Run kicked off with 400+ participants Saturday morning of Homecoming. After finishing the beautiful one-mile course through campus, many enjoyed the Family Fun Zone and then watched Knights football and volleyball.



here on the

hill

Cider, Anyone?

Beautiful October temps, outdoor music, games, and goodies made our campus Fall Festival a great day!

Sports Camps

At our football team camp, 140 athletes and 22 coaches from three Lutheran high schools made great use of The Bowl and the Betty Kohn Fieldhouse. We also hosted a golf camp, where students from seven Lutheran high schools got pro tips at three golf courses and on the MLC simulators.

Fall Festival

What's a Fall Festival without some punkin paintin'?



Strike Up the Band!

The Wind Symphony presented some of the great wind band classics in their Homecoming weekend concert.



Starting Them Young!

The littles from our Early Childhood Learning Center made a trip to the "big kids' library."



Dominating the Net

The Knights beat Crown at Homecoming, another win in a winning season!



In Honor of Jim

At a volleyball match in September we honored Jim Unke, our athletic director who went to his heavenly home in July 2022, by dedicating the James M. Unke Court. Here, current AD Dave Biedenbender presents Jim's wife, Lori, with a commemorative plaque.

Thalassa Prize 2023

The Thalassa Prize is given to recognize a Martin Luther College student or graduate who expresses clearly and beautifully, in image and word, a personal reflection on a ministry experience overseas.

2023 Winner:

Go in Peace, Your Sins Are Forgiven

Nathan Golisch MLC '22

Philippines

In 23 years, I've met thousands of Confessional Lutherans my age. It's an odd thing, trying to imagine what my spiritual journey would have been without experiencing that sort of seemingly endless fellowship.

For the 30 or so young people of Law and Gospel Lutheran in Metro Manila, Philippines, fellowship calls to mind something different. Not 12 years of Christian schooling or the sound of an organ overpowering the Sunday morning buzz of 300 souls gathering together in His Name.

No, for these young people, it's the weekly Sunday morning walk together to worship, the older hand-in-hand with the Sunday School little ones. It's the praise and prayer they offer without the compulsion of any adults in their life. It's the hours spent with one another after the service is over, the home-cooked meal prepared for them to enjoy. And now, it's the bread and wine, the body and blood.

Confirmation class had been put on hold under the strict lockdowns in the Philippines, but on Easter Sunday this year—and for the first time in over five years—10 young people were confirmed in their Christian faith.

With that, fellowship meant something new—an almost 2,000-year-long tradition. "Take and eat . . . Take and drink . . ."

Seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting the bread and wine. Hearing "Go in peace; your sins are forgiven." All the senses are at work. All of God's promises are at work. For them. For us. At that moment, 10 young men and women are experiencing in a new way the extravagant grace of God together with the Communion of Saints around the world.

They are experiencing Christ again.

Nathan Golisch was commissioned by the Friends Network to serve as a missionary to Law and Gospel Lutheran Church and the Novaliches community, a densely populated suburb of Quezon City in Metro Manila, Philippines. MLC's Cultural Engagement Center awarded Nathan \$1,000, half of which he designated to the Friends Network. This is the 17th annual Thalassa Prize awarded by MLC.



Martin Luther College has now begun accepting submissions for the 18th annual **Thalassa Prize**.

DEADLINE:

April 30, 2024

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES &

ALL PAST WINNERS:

mlc-wels.edu/Thalassa



2023 Entry: Making New Traditions *excerpt*

Lydia Schultz MLC '21
Thailand

During Easter, the store is usually filled with chocolate and Easter baskets. This is not the case in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Easter is not advertised or celebrated unless you are in the Church, which makes it extra important to share the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with new friends. Over Easter weekend I had the privilege of hosting some good friends for an Easter party. We dyed Easter eggs and had several Easter egg hunts. More importantly, we used this time together to have a Bible study. For some of these friends, it was their first time hearing the Word and talking about the assurance we have in Christ. . . .

Lydia Schultz works with the Friends Network at Promise Lutheran Church in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



2023 Entry: The Table *excerpt*

Emily Raymond DMLC '22
Dominican Republic

From the outside, you may not think much of my church. It's not the fanciest church building with the newest technology, nor does it have the best decorations or the latest organ. The people of *Iglesia Luterana Cristiana Cordero de Dios* make this church home.

At first glance, this table doesn't seem like much. However, it reminds me of the love and dedication of my Dominican brothers and sisters in Christ, serving God in all they do. Let me tell you why.

The Lord's Supper: We get to share in the same sacrament as our brothers and sisters in the faith from the U.S.A.

Photo of our College on the Hill: They have never visited MLC, but the students are in their prayers each week!

Tambourines: We may not have the best organ or praise band. However, we sing from the heart.

Flowers: I joined our dedicated ladies' group. They work hard to beautify the sanctuary.

Hymn Books: When the projector doesn't work, we use these to raise our voices in song!

Photo of Picho, a member who passed away: This was a hard loss for our church family in December, but we know we will meet again someday!

Letter from an MLC student: We were honored to host two outstanding MLC students for a Daylight mission trip in January. At their last Bible study, Alaina read her handwritten note to the church. Our members were so impacted they decided to frame it.



It is so much more than just a "table" for me. Each Sunday, I am reminded of why we come together—to strengthen our faith in God's Word and encourage each other.

In our Savior's words from Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Emily Raymond teaches at a bilingual school in Santiago, Dominican Republic, and serves Iglesia Luterana Cristiana Cordero de Dios there in many ways, including outreach, children's ministry, women's ministry, and music.

EMMANUEL • KING OF KINGS
 MESSIAH • UNTO US YOUR GOD!
 WONDERFUL COUNSELOR • JESUS
 CHRIST • EVERLASTING FATHER
 PRINCE OF PEACE • MIGHTY GOD
 SON • OMNIPOTENT
 LORD OF LORDS • EMMANUEL
 GOD WITH US •

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Faith,

For unto us a child is born (Isaiah 9:6 KJV).

As our students sing a portion of Handel's *Messiah* at the Christmas concert this year, these words of Isaiah will ring out.

But before you begin humming Handel's melody, stop to imagine: If someone knew nothing about Christmas, how could they possibly believe that an apparently helpless child is the hope of all nations? He's born in poverty. Wrapped in the diapers of the day. Sleeping in the arms of an unknown girl.

But you know the rest! As Isaiah tells us—in the KJV that Handel used—*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

Don't be confused by infant cries. Here lies the one who counsels your heart! Don't misunderstand the weakness. Here lies creation's mighty God! Yes, he's born to a humble virgin, but he's the everlasting Father, who keeps you safe in his protecting arms. Yes, he's born into a world devastated by sin, but he's the Prince of Peace who says, "You are forgiven!"

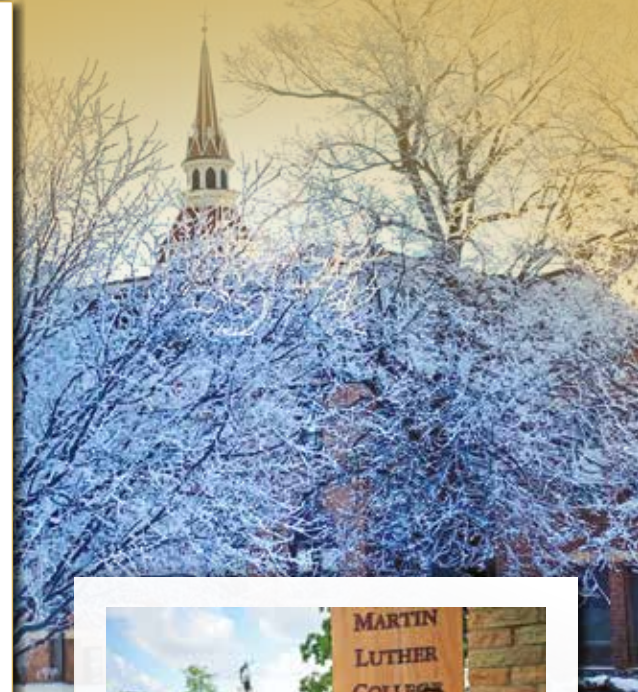
That's why the gift of this child fills us with joy. That's why Martin Luther College prepares students not just to sing of him at a concert, but to herald him to the world.

Your continued prayers and generous gifts to the MLC Fund further that mission! Thank you!



Rich Gurgel

Rich Gurgel
 President, Martin Luther College



Thank You!

You Saw the Need. You Gave the Gift. You're Making a Difference!

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

As friends of MLC and partners with us in sharing the gospel, you know about the shortage of teachers and pastors in our synod. When we presented to you a new way to prepare *second-career teachers*, you immediately responded! You understood how this could be part of a solution, and you opened your hearts and gave! *Thank you!*

Now an update: Since January 2023, Dr. Nichole LaGrow, program director, has been hard at work, putting the necessary pieces into place for this program that utilizes Competency-Based Education (CBE). Dr. Marty LaGrow DMLC '93, instructional designer, is working with faculty to construct the actual courses.

In the CBE paradigm, we will be awarding elementary education degrees to second-career adults based on their proven competence in courses. CBE enables learners to use their past experiences and job skills as part of their learning experience. This provides an alternative pathway to the teaching ministry for those who are unable to move to New Ulm for a traditional on-campus program. It allows WELS members to finish their college degrees while staying in their own communities and their own jobs—some of which are in WELS schools.



Dr. Marty LaGrow and Dr. Nichole LaGrow

Update: We are on track for enrolling our first CBE students in fall 2024—thanks to you, your prayers, your gifts!

CHAPEL OF THE CHRIST LOWER LEVEL



When we explained that we needed more music rehearsal and recital space, you understood that need. You understood that music is a special gift of God for his church, and that an MLC student *today* may very well be your music teacher, choir or band director, worship leader, organist, or pianist *tomorrow*.

When we suggested that we already have the square footage available in the lower level of Chapel of the Christ, and that we just needed to renovate it, you responded! *We thank all of you for your gifts—with a special shout-out to New Life Lutheran Church in Shoreview MN for their extremely generous gift.*

Update: We are planning to begin the infrastructure work in early 2024—thanks to you, your prayers, your gifts!



Still want to donate?
Go to mlc-wels.edu/donate.



Tuition Assistance Makes All the Difference

Ben Bilitz and **Sarah (née Musgrave) Bilitz** MLC '99 are convinced of two very important truths: We dare not *underestimate* the difficulty some students have in paying college tuition. And we simply cannot *overestimate* the value of Martin Luther College in our church body.

That's why the Bilitzes are paying their blessings forward by supporting tuition assistance at MLC today.

Paying Tuition Is Challenging

Sarah remembers well the challenge of making tuition payments as a young college student. Following in the footsteps of her mother, **Susan (née Rauch) Musgrave** DMLC '74, Sarah enrolled at DMLC in 1994. She belongs to that cohort of students who enrolled at one college, Dr. Martin Luther College, and graduated from another, Martin Luther College. Though the name changed, however, the bills remained the same. "I remember worrying about paying tuition back when I was in college, and that was when tuition was so much less than it is now," she says. "Ben and I are thankful that we can alleviate some of that stress from students' lives."

Ben recalls that even paying for his area Lutheran high school education was a struggle, especially when he lost his father. "It was not easy for my family to send us to Shoreland," he says. "While I was in high school, my father passed away. I know there were people that helped provide money to my mom during that time to help with overall expenses."

Ben and Sarah understand that tuition assistance is help that is *right on time*. "People who are going to MLC are not in it for the money," Ben says. "Once they have their first assignment, there is support for them from their school, congregation, and community. Tuition assistance is a way to help them early on." And the Bilitzes understand the recruitment angle as well. They know the sad truth that some students may give up on their dream to be a pastor, teacher, or staff minister because college is expensive. "It can be a

challenging decision to go to MLC," Ben says. "We don't want the cost of college to be a reason someone decides not to pursue being a called worker."

Once again recalling his youth, Ben says, "God provided for my family when my dad passed, and he continues to provide for our family today. I'd like to use the blessings he's given us to do our part to help provide support for others who need it most."

MLC Ministry Training Is Vital

Being closely tied to the church throughout their lives—and having a daughter, Anna, who's a senior at MLC now—the Bilitzes firmly believe in the importance of ministry training at Martin Luther College.

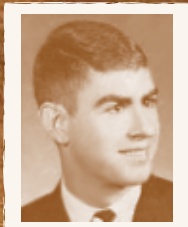
"Without our WELS training schools, where would we be?" Sarah says. "They are so necessary for continuing to serve our congregations with Christian education. Plus, ministerial training schools are important for our church body as a whole. Whether or not students take a call, they have been trained in God's Word and can take that knowledge to serve their congregations in so many ways—Sunday school teacher,



The Bilitz family: Sarah, Isaac (Lakeside LHS '24), Anna (MLC '24), Ben, and Lydia (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater '26).



Laura Pringle
MLC 2009
Hustisford WI



Errol Carlson
NWC 1964
Tacoma WA



Kelly Hauf
MLC 2014
Manitowoc WI



Dennis Smith
NWC 1969
Poynette WI

Congregational Partner Grant Program



Lutheran Pioneer leader, Bible study facilitator, choir member, etc. The synod's investment in ministry training is a blessing to congregations beyond just pastors, teachers, and staff ministers."

Ben agrees. Because of our excellent Lutheran school system, supported by the called workers produced by MLC, he says we all rest on the same biblical foundation. "The world can be a challenging place, and we believers are not perfect, but having that sound biblical teaching really makes a difference. Also, having been married to Sarah for almost 25 years, I see the depth of training that her years at MLC has provided her. It has certainly been a blessing to our family."

Paying the Blessings Forward

God certainly has blessed the Bilitzes! Both Ben and Sarah attended St. John Lutheran School in Burlington, Wisconsin, and Shoreland Lutheran High School in Somers, Wisconsin. Ben explains that they weren't childhood sweethearts, but he likes to tease Sarah that she secretly had a crush on him all those years.

They married shortly after Sarah graduated from MLC in December 1998. That spring Sarah took her double major in elementary ed and secondary English ed to her first assignment in the grade 3-5 classroom at St. Paul-East Troy WI. When their daughter Anna was born in 2002, Sarah transitioned to stay-at-home mom but continued to serve St. Paul as a tutor, organist, and volunteer. Twenty years later, she is teaching again—this time at Peace-Sun Prairie WI, where she puts her English degree to work, teaching eighth grade language arts while the principal, **Steve White** MLC '12, '20, has release time for administrative work. In one of those wonderful WELS connections, Sarah's principal was her student at East Troy when her ministry began.

Ben, meanwhile, earned an associate degree in police science and then a bachelor's in accounting from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He worked in public accounting for about 10 years and then joined Alliant Energy in 2011, where he's currently the chief accounting officer. He too has been very active in his congregations, serving as treasurer and as a member on many different boards and committees, including Adult Discipleship Committee, Board of Elders, and School Board.

The couple recognizes that Christ's gifts have been beautifully measured into their lives, and they wish to thank him by sharing their financial blessings with others who need them—including MLC students who are preparing to serve the church as pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.

Ben and Sarah Bilitz are regular supporters of the tuition assistance program called the Congregational Partner Grant Program. Through CPGP, MLC matches the grants that congregations designate for their members who attend MLC. In 2022-2023, we matched more than \$600,000 in congregational grants, awarding a total of almost \$1.25 million to our students.

And we are looking ahead to even bigger numbers. According to our strategic plan, **Pursuing Excellence Under the Cross**, we are boosting the "match max" by 10% every year. In 2023-24, we are matching \$1,325 per student. That's \$2,650 in financial assistance. We will match \$1,450 per student in 2024-25 and \$1,600 per student in 2025-26. Over the course of four years, participating students can easily receive more than \$10,000 in assistance from this program alone.

It is a challenge for MLC to raise the matching funds every year, but donors like the Bilitzes are making it happen.

Will You Be the Match?

Congregations and individuals who want to support the Congregational Partner Grant Program but do not have any members preparing for the public ministry at MLC can still contribute to this grant program.

You can be the match! Special thanks go to Lamb of God Lutheran Church in Madison, Alabama, for their generous gift to the CPGP Matching Fund.

The continuation of this program relies heavily on the generosity of our donors. Your gifts can help MLC match congregational grants for years to come.



Give online at
mlc-wels.edu/donate.



**Faye
Taecker**
DMLC 1959
Watertown SD



**David
Marquardt**
MLC 2014
Lodi CA



**Julie
Bergemann**
DMLC 1984
Wauwatosa WI



**Willette
McElroy**
DMLC 1994
Milwaukee

Focus On *Scholarships*

THE LARRY CZER ENGLISH SCHOLARSHIP

The Larry Czer English Scholarship was established in 2023 by his wife, Ramona Czer.

Larry (1957-2023) dedicated his life to the service of his Lord. He earned a BS in education from Dr. Martin Luther College and an MA in English from St. Cloud State, and he finished the coursework (all but dissertation) for a PhD in rhetoric and composition at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

In Larry's ministry, he served as principal and grade 1-8 teacher at Christ Our Redeemer LS-Bend OR (1979-1981), principal and grade 6-8 teacher at St. John LS-Fox Lake WI (1981-1987), English, pre-algebra teacher, and coach at West LHS-Hopkins MN (1987-1992), and English professor and coach at (Dr.) Martin Luther College (1992-2023).

Larry's contributions during his 31-year tenure at (D)MLC were broad and lasting. Early on, he chaired the committee that developed the Junior Writing Assessment, led faculty workshops on technology in the classroom, helped develop the college's early website, edited the college catalog, and served on the Scheduling Committee. In the last 15 years, he helped reinvigorate the Writing Center and the Communicating Across the Curriculum Committee, and he chaired the 2014 Quality Initiative Task Force for the Higher Learning Commission, which led to recruiting and retaining more students from underrepresented groups.

His wife, Ramona, shares that Larry loved teaching English. "Hundreds and hundreds of language arts teachers in WELS grade schools and high schools across America today are effective Christian communicators and educators



due to the day-to-day efforts of Larry Czer," she says. "His students were never just vessels to fill up with knowledge, but precious blood-bought souls God had entrusted to him, each with a story of his or her own. He daily imprinted his student-readers with a vision, a sense of wonder in the power of words, and many in turn

took his vision and made it their own in their classrooms. Through their children's children, that story lives on today."

Larry also made an impact in MLC athletics, where he served as women's golf coach for eight years and women's basketball coach for seven years. His 2011-12 basketball team had the most successful season in MLC program history, finishing 12-2 in the UMAC and earning an NCAA tournament berth.

Possibly due to his many years of coaching women—and having four daughters—Larry developed a keen sensitivity to women's perspectives and a gift for encouraging them. He often spoke about sponsoring a scholarship that would encourage young women in their studies.

It is Ramona's prayer that Larry's love of his Savior and of his students—and his firm belief in the power of language to move hearts and minds for the good of God's kingdom—will live on after him through this scholarship.

The annual scholarship recipient will be the female English major, junior or senior, who has earned the highest GPA in her English coursework. Should there be a tie, the student with the greater financial need will receive the scholarship.



Dennis Himm
NWC 1979
Chesaning MI



Rachel Kaesmeyer
DMLC 1979
Saginaw MI



Timothy Duin
NWC 1964
Johnson MN



Pamela Merten
DMLC 1974
Waukesha WI



When you establish a Legacy Scholarship, you can . . .

- Honor a loved one by naming the scholarship after them
- Support a specific area of ministry training that's important to you
- Specify whether the scholarship supports students based on their merit or their need
- Know that you are making a significant difference in students' lives
- Receive a personal thank-you letter from a scholarship recipient
- Receive special tax benefits
- Leave a lasting legacy at MLC
- Glorify the Lord of the Church!

You choose the size and scope of your scholarship.

FOR EXAMPLE . . .

- An annual gift of **\$1,000** could be awarded as one or two smaller scholarships per year.
- An annual gift of **\$10,000** could be awarded as several scholarships every year.
- An endowed scholarship of **\$25,000** would allow us to award 4% annually in scholarships.

We'll help you set it up.

Mark Maurice, VP for Mission Advancement
mauricme@mlc-wels.edu • 507.354.8221 x386

Beth Scharf, Resource Development Counselor
scharfbm@mlc-wels.edu • 507.354.8221 x241

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving
mcg@wels.net • 800.827.5482



If You Invite Us, We'll Say Yes!

Could we visit your congregation for an MLC Sunday? Could we present to your OWLS group, LWMS, or other organization?

Our professors are ready to preach, lead Bible class, and give presentations on

what's new at Martin Luther College. Please contact Christy at freycm@mlc-wels.edu to request a visit from us!

We're also grateful to the congregations that have recently hosted MLC Sundays: Amazing Grace-South Beloit IL, Zion-Chesaning MI, Cross of Christ-Boise ID, St. John-Nodine MN, St. John-New Ulm MN, Bethlehem-Menomonee Falls WI, St. Paul-Plymouth NE. We loved speaking with you!

Pictured: Professor Dave Scharf, one of our MLC presenters

Year-End Giving

Two Creative Options to Benefit MLC—and You!

Individual Retirement Account (IRA)

Are you 70.5 years old or better? Are you required to take a distribution from your IRA? If you answered 'yes' to either of these questions, then you can receive a wonderful tax benefit by making a charitable gift *directly* from your IRA to Martin Luther College!

Your IRA provider receives many requests at year-end to process charitable distributions. *Please don't wait to finalize your IRA charitable gifts!*

Appreciated Stock or Mutual Fund Shares

Generous tax savings can be yours by donating securities that have appreciated in value. With year-end fast approaching, please call MLC now to learn how we can make this an easy way to give!

Interested in learning more about year-end giving to MLC? We can help! Please contact us!

Mark Maurice or Beth Scharf at MLC
507.354.8221 | mauricme@mlc-wels.edu | scharfbm@mlc-wels.edu

WELS Ministry of Christian Giving
800.827.5482 | mcg@wels.net

WELS Foundation, a partner of MLC
800.752.8940 | WELSFoundation@wels.net



Jeffrey Hugo
DMLC 1979
Bangor WI



Kimberly Baldwin
MLC 1999
Silverwood MI



Hugo Ugalde-Bemer
MLC 2019
Cedar Rapids IA



Carrie Herlich
MLC 1999
Manito IL

Focus On Alumni

By Beth Scharf MLC '00

Welcome Back!

Four classes recently gathered to relive the good times! Is your class or affinity group (team, musical cast, etc.) ready to reunite? The Alumni Relations Office is here to help you get it rolling! If you choose to hold your reunion on campus, you can benefit from free use of facilities, meals in our cafeteria, tours, and much more. Go to mlc-wels.edu/alumni/reunions or contact Beth Scharf at scharfbm@mlc-wels.edu to get started.





It Was 50 Years Ago—and We Still Remember!



At the Homecoming game on September 30, we celebrated another victory from 50 years ago—almost to the day!

On September 29, 1973, after a decades-long hiatus, the DMLC football program celebrated an incredible win. Though the college had fielded a team already in the 30s, scheduling in those years was difficult. In 1971, DMLC once again began competing officially—and losing game after game after game.

But on that glorious Saturday in September '73, the Lancers finally broke their two-year, 10-game losing streak with a resounding 27-7 win over Dana College of Nebraska. The *New Ulm Journal* captured the excitement: “It would have seemed . . . the Lancers had just won a conference championship . . . fans emptied the stands and stormed the field.”

On another glorious Saturday at The Bowl—our Homecoming game on September 30—we honored members of the 1973 team, including the quarterback, **Professor Emeritus Tom Hunter (#18)**.

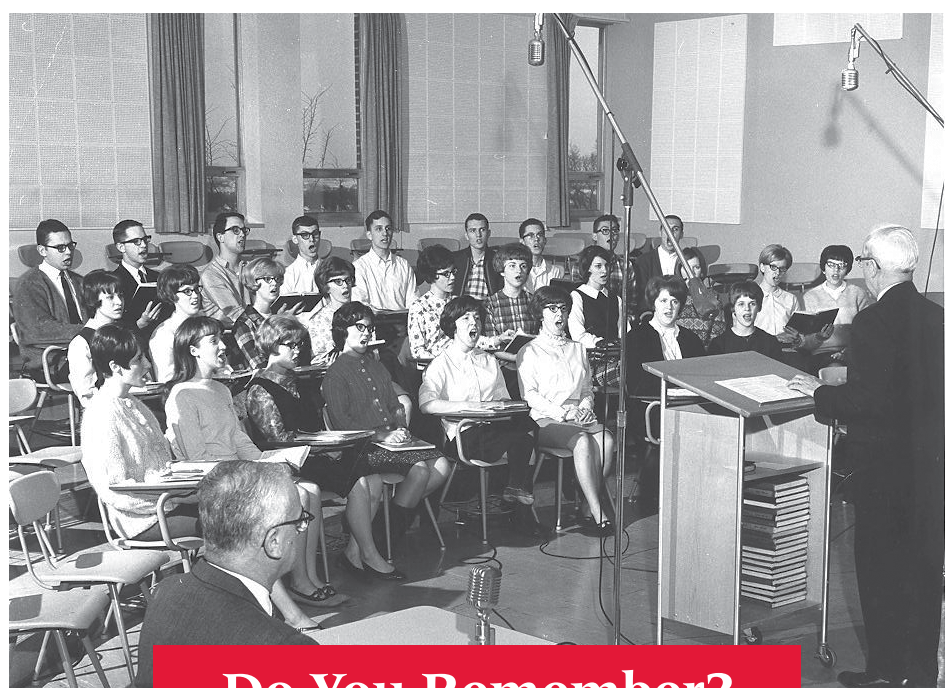
Our current football team is built on the tradition of two programs—DMLC and Northwestern College, which had many accomplishments to celebrate. We are thankful for all the alumni who have participated in campus-wide athletics over the years and used their gifts to God’s glory!



Read the full article from the *New Ulm Journal* and see the 1973 football roster.

Focus On Alumni

By Beth Scharf MLC '00



Do You Remember?

We found this photo of a choir being recorded. What can you tell us? Is this high school? College? What year? Were they recording for a Sunday morning radio broadcast? Please send any information you have to **Beth Scharf** at scharfbm@mlc-wels.edu. Thank you!



Knight Knight Baby!

Little Samuel Wong can't wait to be a Knight! He was born to **Nathan Wong MLC '18, WLS '22** and **Kaitlyn Solofra Wong MLC '20** on February 10, 2022, and he could graduate in the MLC class of 2044. Pastor Wong serves Shepherd of the Bay-Lusby MD.

Have a great shot of your future Knight in some natty Knight apparel? Send it to InFocus@mlc-wels.edu.

From July 2023 issue:

Thank you, alumni! With information you provided, we were able to piece together the story of this photo of Junto from 1967. This field trip to the State Capitol in St. Paul included sitting in on a trial of a man who was ticketed for speeding because he didn't understand how to convert kilometers to miles, seeing a movie (possibly *The Ten Commandments*), and eating DMLC sack lunches at a local student's home in St Paul. Special thank you to **Wilma (Holz) Guenterberg DMLC '68**, **W. Michele (Murray) Wiederich DMLC '69**, and **Janine (England) Enter DMLC '68** for your help!



Arthur Wessels
DMLC 1969
Omak WA



Judith Hasbargen
DMLC 1979
Pasco WA



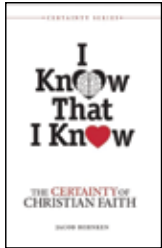
Michael Schulz
DMLC 1994
West Bend WI



Heidi Graf
DMLC 1989
Hustisford WI

FACULTY & STAFF NOTES

Professor Peter Baganz DMLC '87 (history/social science) accepted the position of treasurer for the Board of Directors of Amazing Grace Virtual Academy.



Professor Jacob Behnken MLC '08, WLS '12 (dean of chapel) was interviewed podcast-style by Jeremy Bakken of Northwestern Publishing House in April to promote his book *I Know That I Know: The Certainty of Christian Faith* (NPH 2020).

Professor Darrell Berg DMLC '88 (education, art) earned his MA in arts education from the Art of Education University. His capstone research project was "Preparing Pre-Service General Education Teachers for Using Choice in Art Education."

Dr. Michael Berg MLC '00, WLS '05 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) saw publication of two books: *On Any Given Sunday: The Story of Christ in the Divine Service* (New Reformation Press, 2023) and *The Baptismal Life* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2023). He published "Why I Am Confident" in the August 2023 issue of *Forward in Christ*. He presented two Bible studies, "Peter and the Theology of the Cross," at St. John-Wauwatosa WI in August and "The Theology of the Cross," at Star of Bethlehem-New Berlin WI in March and April 2023. He is cohost of the podcast *Let the Bird Fly!* He serves on The Institute of Lutheran Apologetics. And finally, he presented at several conferences:

- "Critical Theory" – Lutheran Society of Hillsdale College in Hillsdale MI in September
- "Lutheran Worship" – Nebraska District Pastors' Summer Quarter in Omaha in July
- "A Lutheran Response to Critical Theory" – Nebraska District Missionaries' Conference in Denver in April

Professor Rebecca Cox DMLC '89 (physical education) was nominated by the UMAC and then selected by the NCAA to attend the Division III Senior Woman Administrator Program, including the Woman Leaders in Sports Convention, in New Orleans in October.



Michelle Gartner DMLC '93 (event coordinator) earned her Certified Meeting Professional certification.

Laurie Gauger-Hested DMLC '87 (writer/editor) earned her MA in religion at Concordia University Chicago.

Dr. Kelli Green DMLC '92 (special ed) earned her EdD in educational leadership and learning at the University of St. Thomas-Minneapolis after successfully defending her

dissertation, "The Special Education Administrative Structure in Private School Systems: A Multiple Case Study." She also made several recent presentations:

- "What's My Role? For the Private School Professional" – Wisconsin LHS Principals' Conference (co-presenter) in June
- "The Accommodation Process for Private School Professionals" – Westside Christian School-Madison WI in August and Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in October
- "Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports for Private School Professionals" – Bloomington Living Hope LS-Bloomington MN in August
- "Public and Private Collaboration and Interventions for Students with Special Needs" – Twin Cities Principals' Conference at St. John LS-Golden Valley MN in September

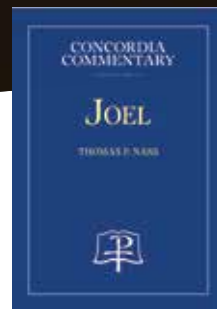
Dr. Timothy Grundmeier MLC '07 (history) presented "Transcribing and Translating the Correspondence of C. F. W. Walther: Past Work, Present Status, Future Prospects" at the Walther Roundtable, held in May at Concordia Historical Institute-St. Louis.

Professor Grace Hennig DMLC '89 (music) gave a presentation on the new WELS hymnal, "CW Blue: What's Old? What's New?", at the biennial conference of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians in Philadelphia in July. She served as a music composition and music performance adjudicator for the 56th National Festival of the American Turners held in New Ulm in July. She co-presented "From Grassroots Discussions to Classroom Impact" at the Lutheran College Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in August. And she presented "Infusing Music in the Elementary Classroom" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in October.



Professor Paul Koelpin NWC '85, WLS '90 (history, theology) presented "The Kingdom(s) and the Power and the Glory: A Biblical and Confessional Perspective on the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms" at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium in September. He also presented "These Things Are Written: How the Bible Came to Us" at the Camp Croix Men's Retreat in September. He preached for the Reformation service in the Fond du Lac WI area in October. Finally, he was appointed to serve as the MLC representative on the Northwestern Publishing House Board.

FACULTY & STAFF NOTES



Dr. Jennifer Krause MLC '96 (education) earned her PhD in leadership, with a specialization in reading, language, and literacy, at Concordia University Chicago after successfully defending her dissertation, "How Fifth- and Sixth-Grade Teachers Use Read-Alouds to Support Student Learning."

Dr. Nichole LaGrow (director, Nontraditional Education) earned her Master of Studies in Law (MSL) with a concentration in higher education law and compliance at Samford University. She was named editor for *Forum of International Research on Students and Teaching (FIRST)*, a peer-reviewed journal published by the New York College Learning Skills Association. She presented the welcome keynote, "When the Well Runs Dry: Reaffirming the Importance of Self-Care," at the February NYCLSA Annual Symposium. She co-presented "Designing Accessible Resources" at the Wisconsin College Personnel Association Professional Development Institute in April. She also served on the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay panel, "Embracing a Community of Care: COVID and Beyond" at the Joys of Teaching Conference sponsored by the University of Wisconsin System in April.

Dr. Robert Martens MLC '09 (director, Information Technology) earned his PhD in leadership, with an emphasis in information systems, at the University of the Cumberland after successfully defending his dissertation, "Correlated Outcomes and Servant Leadership Behaviors in the Lutheran Parish."

Dr. John Meyer DMLC '87 (director, Graduate Studies and Continuing Education) made several recent presentations:

- "Furthering Feedback with Video Observations" – New Teacher Induction Lead Mentor Conference in Nashville in June
- "Formative School Culture" – Luther HS Principals' Conference Fall Teacher Inservice in August
- "Learning-Focused Instruction" and "Lutheran Principals for the 21st Century" – Dakota-Montana-Nebraska Teachers' Conference in Salt Lake City in October
- "Lutheran Principals for the 21st Century" – Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference in Milwaukee in October

Professor Thomas Nass NWC '77, WLS '82 (Hebrew) has seen publication of his book *Joel*, an academic commentary for pastors, by Concordia Publishing House.



Dr. Mark Paustian NWC '84, WLS '88 (English, Hebrew) published "A Critique of Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality: A Christian Micro-Social Constructivist View" for the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Summer 2023). He guested on the *Impact* podcast to discuss Noah and on the *Let the Bird Fly* podcast to discuss the power of words. He recently made several presentations:

- "Here I Stand: Lutherans Finding Their Voice in Christian Apologetics" – Pacific Northwest District Men's Retreat in Fort Worden WA in April
- "Overhearing the Gospel [Indirect Communication]" – Breckenridge Summer School pastors' conference in Breckenridge CO in June
- "The Things We Place Between [Art and the Gospel]" – Heart & Hands Conference in Milwaukee in June
- "Biblical Encouragement: The Power of Words" – Project Veritas in Mukwonago WI in October

Dr. Gene Pfeifer DMLC '81 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) gave the keynote address, "One Strategy (Four Outcomes) That Promote Thoughtfulness in Your Classroom," at the ELS Teacher Convention in Philadelphia in July.

Dr. Joel Pless WLS '86 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) presented the keynote address, "Graced, Summoned, Sequenced: What It Means to Be a Called Worker," at the Lutheran College Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in August.

Instructor Michael Plocher DMLC '93, MLC '16 (adjunct, education) sat on a panel discussing AI and ChatGPT at the Lutheran College Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in August. He also presented "Using AI in Education" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in October.



John Franzmann
NWC 1959
Watertown WI



Catherine Rubin
DMLC 1984
Phoenix



Seth Porinsky
MLC 2009
Dexter MI



Amy Danell
DMLC 1989
Red Wing MN

Dr. Jonathan Roux DMLC '94 (education) presented "Reading Workshop: Welcoming Students into Literature" at the Lake Lutheran Conference inservice in Manitowoc WI in June and "Board Books and Picture Books for the Early Childhood World" and "What's New in Picture Books and Chapter Books? (Gr 1-8)" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in October.

Professor David Scharf MLC '00, WLS '05 (theology) was re-elected to another six-year term as chair of the WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling. He presented the keynote, "Devotional Life of a Called Worker," at the Arizona-California District Teachers' Conference in November. He and his wife, **Beth Scharf** MLC '00, presented the keynote, "Encouragement to Serve God to the Fullest," at the LPS Ministry Day in November. He preached and made presentations about MLC at Faith-Prior Lake MN, St. John-Newtonburg WI, St. Paul-Saginaw MI, Amazing Grace-South Beloit IL, Zion-Columbus WI, Cross of Christ-Boise ID, and Bethlehem-Germantown WI. He also continues to serve as writer of the monthly "Q & A" column in *Forward in Christ* and as a regular contributor to *Grace Moments* devotions (Time of Grace-Milwaukee).

Dr. Jonathan Schaefer MLC '02 (director, New Teacher Induction) presented "Positive and Productive Learning Environments" and "Assessment-Driven Instruction: Never Work Harder than Your Students" at the Michigan District Teachers' Conference at Hope Christian Academy in October.

Professor Emeritus John Schmidt NWC '70, WLS '74 recently completed a semester as a "Greek Prof on Loan" at Michigan Lutheran Seminary.

Professor Nicolas Schmoller MLC '06, WLS '10 (Greek, theology) was appointed to the WELS Committee on Inter-Church Relations (CICR). In August, he and Professor David Scharf guested on the *Let the Bird Fly* podcast to discuss confessional Lutheran colleges.

Professor Emeritus Steven Thiesfeldt DMLC '74 has served as a part-time administrator at Michigan Lutheran Seminary since fall 2022, channeling his leadership primarily toward the development and implementation of a strategic plan.

Professor Alan Uher DMLC '87 (education) presented "Engaging the Disengaged" at both the Michigan District and South Atlantic District Pastor-Teacher Conferences, which met in Ohio and Florida, respectively, in June.

Instructor Elisabeth Urtel (fine arts) received her Certificate of Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz after successfully completing a session at its International Summer School: German and Theology in July.

Dr. Keith Wessel NWC '87, WLS '91 (Latin, theology) accepted a three-year appointment to WELS One Europe Team. He also presented "Old Testament Worship: Tabernacle and Temple" at the three-evening Bible Blitz hosted by Trinity-Minocqua WI in July.



Dr. Cindy Whaley DMLC '76 (education) presented "The Blessing of Effective Faculty Communication" and "Cultural Competency Training for Licensure Renewal" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in October. She also presented a keynote, "What Do an Effective Teacher and a Group of Successful Learners Look Like in Any Educational Setting?", at the Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference in Milwaukee in October.

Dr. Jeffery Wiechman DMLC '92 (VP for Academics) presented "Creating a Championship School Culture" to the principals of the Manitowoc LHS federation in August.

Professor Emeritus Frederick Wulff DMLC '64 self-published *World Travelogues with History*, his 13th book.

Professor Tyson Zarnstorff MLC '05 (education, math) presented "Teaching Mathematics with Understanding (Gr 3-8)" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference at Bethany Lutheran College in October.



Theology Curriculum Task Force Appointees

Three professors have been appointed to the WELS Theology Curriculum Task Force under the auspices of the Commission on Lutheran Schools: **Professor Kayte Gut** MLC '02, '20 (early childhood education), **Professor Scott Schmudlach** DMLC '85 (VP for Administration), and **Dr. Jeffery Wiechman** DMLC '92 (VP for Academics).



Peter Prange
NWC 1994
Janesville WI



Jessica Buller
MLC 2014
Eagan MN



Michael Turriff
NWC 1974
Oak Forest IL



Annette Schultz
MLC 1999
Mankato MN

FACULTY & STAFF NOTES

New Faculty



Aaron Bush
Tutor, Instructor

Aaron is a graduate of Good Shepherd-West Allis WI, Wisconsin LHS (2015), Martin Luther College (2019), and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (2023). He served his vicar year at Abiding Grace—Covington GA. Aaron and his wife, Hannah (née Zoller), have one son, Benedict (10 months).



Aaron Dolan
Professor of Theology, Coach

Aaron is a graduate of Fox Valley LHS (1999), Martin Luther College (2003), and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (2007). He has served as a tutor at Luther Preparatory School, associate pastor at First-Racine WI, and teacher and coach at Fox Valley LHS. He and his wife, Sarah (née Janke), have three children, Silas (9), August (7), and Gretchen (7).



Alyssa Heckendorf
Admissions Counselor

Alyssa attended St. Peter-Schofield WI, Immanuel-Greenville WI, Fox Valley LHS (2019), and Martin Luther College (2023). For the 2021-2022 school year, she served as an emergency grade 1-2 teacher at Ascension-Sarasota FL. Alyssa is engaged to Justin Schroeder MLC '22, a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary student. She has two younger brothers, Caleb and Connor, in the preseminary program at MLC.



Sam Hunter
Professor of Physical Education, Coach

Sam is a graduate of St. Paul LES-New Ulm MN, Minnesota Valley LHS (2002), and Martin Luther College (2006). He's served as a dormitory supervisor and instructor at St. Croix LHS (now Academy), a grade 5-6 teacher and principal at St. John-Newburg WI, and an instructor at Shoreland LHS, where he filled the roles of academic dean, technology director, STEM and physical education teacher, and coach. Sam holds master's degrees in both educational leadership (University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh) and

physical education (University of Arkansas). He is a nationally certified strength and conditioning specialist (CSCS). Sam and his wife, Christine (née Bethke), have been married 14 years and have three children, Nolan (10), Olive (8), and Emmitt (6).



Dr. Martin LaGrow
Professor of Education, Instructional Designer for Nontraditional Education

Martin is a graduate of St. Paul LES-New Ulm MN, Minnesota Valley LHS (1989), and Dr. Martin Luther College (1993), where his father, George LaGrow, was an education professor for 15 years. Martin served at Siloah—Milwaukee, Our Savior-Longmont CO, and Trinity-Kaukauna WI. After 14 years, he stepped away from ministry and pursued a career in computing and education. He has worked in the classroom and in administration at Rasmussen College and as a senior academic services consultant at Ellucian, where he supported online program growth for universities across the country. Martin earned his doctorate in instructional technology & distance education from Nova Southeastern University. He and Nichole (see below) have a blended family of five children: Calvin (29), Lexi (25), Caitlyn (24), James (17), and Taylor (14).



Dr. Nichole LaGrow
Professor of Education, Director of Nontraditional Education

Nichole (née Bennett) has her PhD in modern history and literature (Drew University-New Jersey) and several master's degrees: English (Marquette University-Wisconsin), business administration (Western Governors University), management (Wilmington University-Delaware), adult education (Buffalo State College-New York), and law—with an emphasis in higher education (Samford University-Alabama). She also has several specialized certifications and more than 20 years of experience in higher education as a consultant and professor. In her work at seven different universities, she's taught, led divisions, sat on presidential advisory councils, and served as dean. She's also devoted time to WELS ministries, serving as an online curriculum writer, instructor, and catechism teacher at St. Mark-Green Bay WI. She and Marty (see above) have a blended family of five children: Calvin (29), Lexi (25), Caitlyn (24), James (17), and Taylor (14).



Jonah Kroll
MLC 2019
Kumba
Cameroon



Sarah Janke
MLC 2009
Sioux Falls SD



Geoffrey Kieta
NWC 1989
Dowagiac MI



Carol Bauer
DMLC 1974
New Ulm MN



Duane Vance

Professor of Education, Student
Teacher Supervisor

Duane spent most of his childhood in a suburb of Jacksonville, Florida. He graduated from Orange Park High School (1996) and the University of North Florida (2001). He taught public high school for three years before being called into full-time ministry at Jerusalem-Morton Grove IL. During this time, Duane completed synodical certification and also received his master's in education (leadership emphasis) from Martin Luther College (2016). He then served an additional 15 years as executive director at Illinois Lutheran Schools-Crete IL. Duane and his wife, Rebecca (née Ford), have two children, Sarah (19) and Nathan (17).

MLC Professors Attend Global Convention in South Korea

Professors Thomas Nass NWC '77, WLS '82 and **James Danell** NWC '86, WLS '90 attended the Eleventh Triennial Convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in South Korea in June. Nass was re-elected to another three-year term as president of the CELC, which is comprised of 34 churches across the globe. Danell is chair of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations. This year's conference welcomed registrants from 27 different countries, representing 25 CELC churches. "It was a wonderful privilege to be present at the convention with our fellow believers from all around the world," Nass said.



Professor Thomas Nass (center), president of the CELC, poses with four other members of the planning committee: Bradley Kerkow, Timothy Buelow NWC '82, WLS '87, Nathan Seiltz NWC '90, WLS '94, and Mark Schulz.



Professor James Danell (center), chair of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations, is pictured with Pastor Nikolla Bishka (left), president of the Confessional Ev. Lutheran Church of Albania, and Pastor Iliyan Itsov (right), leader of the Confessional Ev. Lutheran Church of Bulgaria.



Third Annual OpenLearning@MLC Conference Sessions Reopened!

MLC Continuing Education offered its third online virtual conference in June. Once again, it was completely free of charge for all called workers in ELS and WELS. Two MLC faculty and three guest presenters offered timely topics. Due to the importance of these topics, we have reopened the presentation sessions for teachers to view and earn clock hours.

Dr. James Carlovsky MLC '02, '10

What Is AI and How Is It Potentially Changing the
Face of Education?

Saxon Math Is No Longer Publishing—Now What Do We Do?

Instructor Michael Plocher DMLC '93, MLC '16

How Can AI Transform Teacher Productivity?

Teacher Ryan Kirchoff MLC '02

How Can AI Transform Student Assessment?

Teacher Brad Gurgel MLC '08

How Do You Empower Parents as Family Spiritual Leaders?

Pastor Alex Groth MLC '07, WLS '11

How Do You Make the Most of Every Opportunity When the Days
Are Evil / Good / Confusing / Wonderful / Frustrating?



**William
Schuerman**
NWC 1984
Corvallis OR



**Rue
Stone**
DMLC 1969
Costa Mesa CA



**Peter
Lemke**
DMLC 1989
Tacoma WA



**Barbara
Pfund**
DMLC 1964
La Salle MI

Passing the Mantle

You are Elijahs! Pastors, teachers, staff ministers, ministers of the gospel of all kinds, as you share the Word of God, you are doing the work of Elijah. And somewhere in your circle of influence is an Elisha, a young person who will take up the mantle of gospel ministry from you (2 Kings 2). Even now, they are watching you, wanting to imitate you, and waiting for a word of encouragement from you.

Many, many MLC students have an Elijah, someone who exemplified joyful ministry and encouraged them to consider ministry. Here are a few:

Grant Gawrisch

(New Life-Shoreview MN)



HIS ELIJAH:
Pastor Dustin Sievert
MLC '03, WLS '07



"Pastor Sievert encouraged me to do my first chapel at St. Croix Lutheran Academy, and he took extra time outside of class to talk ministry. He has been a great role model and encourager for me."

Natalie Luebke

(Trinity-West Bend WI)



HER ELIJAH:
Christin Leckwee
MLC '98

"Mrs. Leckwee sparked a newfound love for music and theatre in me and so many others at Trinity in West Bend, Wisconsin. She taught and directed with such love and passion, and fostered great relationships with her students! I ultimately really admired how she balanced being a mom, wife, and teacher, and was honest that it wasn't always easy!"

Sarah Vance

(St. Paul-New Ulm MN)



HER ELIJAH:
Kelli Wallander
MLC '18

"Mrs. Wallander was a tutor at Luther Prep School. She taught me how to be passionate about people and to strive to love everyone unconditionally."

Joshua Kelm

(St. John-Redwood Falls MN)



HIS ELIJAH:
Mike Mittelstadt DMLC '95



"I've always loved history, and having a teacher like Mr. Mittelstadt at Bethlehem in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, a guy who is so passionate and knowledgeable about history, really made me love it even more. Mr. Mittelstadt's enthusiasm and love for the classes he taught and the students he had—that's how I knew where I wanted to go to college. I wanted to be like Mike."



Check out our **Project Elijah** classroom resources for grade school students! Using these activities to help your K-8 students think about becoming a called worker is one way you can be an Elijah and "pass the mantle" to each Elisha in your classroom.

