

# INFOCUS

MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE



FALL 2024



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On the cover:

**Aubrey Bode** (*Cross of Christ-Coon Rapids MN*) and **Noah Bickelhaupt** (*Apostles-Billings MT*) joined all the other resident assistants in giving new students a hearty welcome at Orientation.

# We Need One Another!

By President Rich Gurgel NWC '81, WLS '86



*“Do your best to come to me quickly, [Timothy,] for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”* (2 Timothy 4:9-11)

These are some remarkable words of Paul. They are among the final words we have from his inspired pen before that pen was silenced by Rome’s death sentence.

**Paul Needed Timothy’s Encouragement:** What stands out is how much Paul cherished the support and encouragement of his fellow Christians. Yes, it’s true: when necessary, Paul knew how to stand all alone against those who opposed him and the gospel. During what Paul called his “first defense” before Nero, everyone deserted him and he did stand alone—but not completely alone, for he knew his Lord Jesus was standing by his side to rescue him (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

Yet here’s what Paul’s strong plea for Timothy to come to Rome reveals: Paul understood that God’s typical way of providing his gospel’s comfort, support, and encouragement is through other people, specifically brothers and sisters in Christ. Just as we thank God that our Lord Jesus took on flesh to become our brother, so we are also thankful when our brothers and sisters in Christ come to our side to bring us God’s strength.

In our Lutheran Confessions, Martin Luther spoke highly of this gift: “the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters” (*Smalcald Articles*, III, article 4). Luther knew this is God’s usual way of bringing to us the comfort of his gospel.

**Called Workers Need Mutual Encouragement:** Our synod has made significant strides in demonstrating the importance of this “mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters” for called workers out in the field. We can see that in the New Teacher Induction (NTI) program at MLC, which pairs new teachers with a mentor for the first two years of ministry. And we see it in the Pastor Partners Mentoring initiative through Grow in Grace at our seminary, which provides new pastors with a peer pastor encourager during the first three years of parish ministry.

**Mutual Encouragement in This Issue:** We hope, as you peruse the articles in this edition of *InFocus*, you will see how we make use of the “mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters” for the benefit of everyone who is part of our campus family. Here’s what you’ll read:

*New Teacher Induction:* You’ll see this mutual conversation and consolation in an interview with a new teacher who learned so much from her mentor in the New Teacher Induction program.

*Early Ministry Experience:* You’ll see it in the report of the new Early Ministry Experience (EME) we are providing for preseminary students. As these young men keep their eyes on the goal of ministry, EME connects them to active parish pastors, older brothers already serving in ministry, who give them very personal encouragement.

Correction: **Professor Emerita Grace Hennig** DMLC '89 served at MLC 2013-2024 (11 years), not 2023-2024, as printed on page 32 of the summer issue of *MLC InFocus*.

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Comments are welcomed and should be directed to [gaugerlf@mlc-wels.edu](mailto: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.



*Student Teaching:* You'll sense that mutual conversation and consolation as you read about the critical mentorships that develop during student teaching. As our education majors approach graduation and their first assignment, they often form deep and encouraging relationships with their cooperating teachers.

*Professor Mentors:* You'll be grateful to God as you read about that mutual conversation and consolation in some of our graduates' comments about the professors who mentored them while they were here on campus.

*Student Ambassadors:* You'll also sense it as you read about the Student Ambassadors in our Admissions Office as they get to know and interact with high school students who are considering pursuing the public ministry at MLC.

*Scholarships:* And of course, while we may not label this as "mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters," the scholarships and other special gifts you'll read about in this issue are very much that same encouragement being given. Every gift proclaims that the gospel matters, and that preparing a new generation to share that gospel with others matters. Every student who benefits from these gifts is encouraged on their path toward public ministry.

**Thank You:** And finally, allow me to say "thank you" to all of you who are taking the time to read this edition of *MLC InFocus*. We know that your interest is reflected in multiple ways: in your prayers for our students, faculty, and staff; in the words of encouragement you speak to us; and in your gifts, which enable us to carry out the mission of our WELS College of Ministry.

God uses all such "mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters" to help us *Pursue Excellence Under the Cross* as we prepare pastors, teachers, and staff ministers to meet WELS ministry needs.

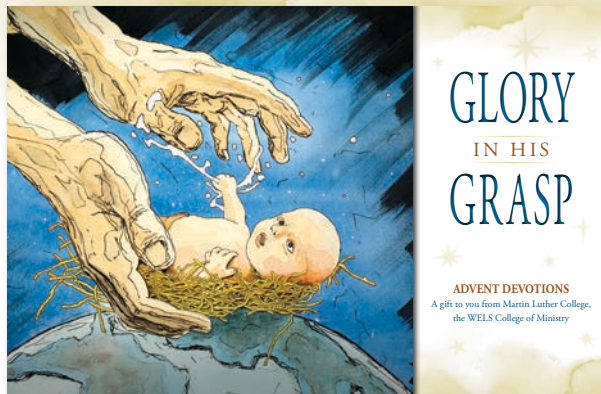
For that we are profoundly grateful to God.

For that we are profoundly grateful to you.



*Pursuing Excellence*  
UNDER THE CROSS

The alumni photos at the bottom of the pages are from the anniversary classes of MLC, NWC, and DMLC: '60, '65, '70, '75, '80, '85, '90, '95, '00, '05, '10, '15, and '20. Thanks to Copy Editor Heidi Schoof DMLC '86, who provided this random selection of alumni.



## Our Gift to You:

*Another Beautiful Advent Devotion Book!*

As we gather around the manger this Advent, we invite you to enjoy our newest devotional, *Glory in His Grasp*.

In these 25 devotions written by MLC faculty, we'll meditate on that ancient hymn Paul writes in Philippians 2:6-11.

We'll contemplate how Christ "emptied himself . . . being born in the likeness of men." We'll stand in awe at how the Son of God, co-equal with the Father, chose for a time not to cling to the full and constant use of his glory and power: "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." And we'll rejoice in the Second Advent, when our Lord in all his glory will come once again.

The devotions are enhanced by the beautiful and thought-provoking watercolors of WELS artist Tom Plamann (922 Ministries-Appleton WI).

### Ordering Options

- Order *free* print copies (10 maximum) after November 18. (Check to see whether your church has already ordered a copy for you!)
- Sign up for personal emails to be sent daily December 1-25.
- Read the devotions online in our digital flipbook.



**Kenneth Edenhauser**  
NWC 1965  
Kenosha WI



**Daniel Balge**  
NWC 1980  
Mequon WI

# MINISTRY MENTORS: Student Teaching

“My confidence in my teaching abilities and running a classroom grew significantly under the mentoring of Mrs. H. We talked about everything. She was not only an amazing mentor but she was—and still is—a great friend!”

**Sarah Kramer**  
*Student Teacher*

“I feel it’s important to build their confidence in themselves and the skills they’ve worked so hard to acquire.”

**Amy Herkstroeter**  
*Student Teaching  
Cooperative Teacher*

“Cooperating teachers play a critical role in preparing teacher candidates for their entrance into the public ministry by bridging the gap between academic preparation and practical application. Through their guidance, these mentors support teacher candidates’ transition from theory to practice in the classroom.

“MLC is grateful for our participating school partnerships and the 130+ cooperating teachers who have volunteered their classrooms this year alone—many of whom continue to volunteer year after year!”

**Professor Adam Pavelchik**  
*MLC Director of Field Experiences*

## It’s a confidence booster. A character builder. A ministry launcher.

Student teaching, the capstone clinical experience for senior education majors, often makes a lifechanging impact. **Sarah Kramer** MLC ’24 can’t say enough about her experience last fall with her onsite cooperating teacher, **Amy Herkstroeter** MLC ’96. Their mentor-mentee partnership in the kindergarten classroom at Faith in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, was exactly what Sarah needed to launch her into her own classroom just a few months later.

“Amy and I clicked right away,” Sarah said. “We had many of the same interests, including music and a love for young kids. Amy has so much energy, joy, and love for teaching and her students. After observing just the first couple of days, I thought to myself, ‘That’s the type of teacher I want to be.’”

**From Day 1:** Taking mental notes from day 1, Sarah saw how Amy managed her classroom—teaching the children how to line up and when to be quiet, for instance—and how she supported each little student in their development. “The students try their best,” Sarah said, “and they meet classroom and academic expectations because their teacher is supporting and encouraging them along the way.”

Amy took note of Sarah’s gifts from day 1 as well. “Sarah was a natural when it came to building relationships with her students. She immediately understood how to talk ‘kindergarten’ and quickly learned how to take command of a room full of 5-year-olds by being firm, but so much

fun. Her confidence exploded! She showed she was excited and gifted to serve in so many ways, and I already knew she would be a blessing to us and to her future students!”

**A Key Takeaway:** As Sarah watched and learned from Amy, one of her most powerful takeaways was the importance of the teacher-parent relationship. “Both the parents and the teacher want to see their child thrive,” Sarah says. “Open communication is key to supporting the child, all while sharing the love of Christ.”

That’s exactly what Amy wanted to impress on her. “Showing our students Jesus is the most important thing, and the *next* thing—even before block planning and bulletin boards—is building solid relationships with students and their families. Good communication lets your families know you care about them and what their children are learning—academically, socially, and emotionally.”

**Mentoring Is Ministry:** Amy considers tending and nurturing student teachers like Sarah an important part of her ministry. She’s worked with six so far. “My own student teaching in Jefferson, Wisconsin, was such an exciting time in preparation for full-time ministry,” she says, “and I want to provide positive and fun teaching experiences for those who are in that same stage of life. I feel it’s important to build their confidence in themselves and the skills they’ve worked so hard to acquire.”



**Barbara Hoffmann**  
DMLC 1970  
Menominee MI



**Aaron Platzer**  
MLC 2015  
Olivet MI



**Hannah Stegman**  
MLC 2020  
New Hope MN



**Dale Arndt**  
NWC 1960  
Vesta MN

# Confidence in the Classroom

Amy also wants them to know that, while teaching is an incredibly joyful vocation, it won't always be easy. "Resilience is important too," she says. "When days are *hard*, and students are *hard*, and parents are *hard*, reacting faithfully and appropriately is an important tool to add to the teacher toolbox. Staying positive in all circumstances is not easy, but it's essential, noticeable, and sometimes even contagious!"

**Ready to Launch:** The formula worked. Sarah left that kindergarten classroom in Fond du Lac ready to go! "My confidence in my teaching abilities and running a classroom grew significantly under the mentoring of Mrs. H. We talked about everything. She was not only an amazing mentor but she was—and still is—a great friend!"

Sarah surprised the kindergartners by coming back to Faith for their graduation in the spring. And at her own graduation from MLC, she was assigned to teach grades 3-4 at Trinity in Brillion, Wisconsin. That puts her only 50 minutes from Fond du Lac, where her mentor and friend first fired her up for ministry.



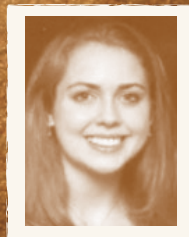
Sarah Kramer (left) loved being mentored for ministry by Amy Herkstroeter (right) during her student teaching experience.



**Karen Becker**  
DMLC 1985  
Youngtown AZ



**Howard Festerling**  
NWC 1965  
Bay City MI



**Mary Balza**  
MLC 2005  
South Haven MI



**Nathanael Lindloff**  
MLC 2020  
Lansing MI

# MINISTRY MENTORS: Early Ministry Experience

“I just wanted to encourage Grant to keep going. There’s a long path ahead of him to become a pastor, but it’s an enjoyable path and the goal at the end is worth it. There are ups and downs, of course, but it is truly an incredible thing to be able to bring God’s Word to his people.”

**Pastor James Hemmelman,**  
*Early Ministry Experience*  
Facilitator

## 8-Year Journey to the Pulpit

### 4 years at Martin Luther College

- Greek, Hebrew, theology courses
- Early Ministry Experiences
- Professor mentoring
- Christian friendships

### 4 years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

- Continued theology courses
- Practical theology
- Annual ministry experiences
- Vicar year at a congregation

Can a meaningful mentoring experience occur within just a few days? Absolutely.

Our new Early Ministry Experience (EME) pairs first-year preseminary students with experienced pastors who fill those few days with a wide range of pastoral experiences. The result? New insights, new enthusiasm, and new conviction for these young men who are just beginning their ministerial training.

**Grant Klas** (*St. John-Fox Lake WI*) spent a few days in March with **Pastor James Hemmelman** MLC '16, WLS '20 at St. Paul-Rapid City, South Dakota.

**Emphasis on Experience:** Over the course of a long weekend, Grant, a first-year student at the time, read the Word during Sunday morning worship, accompanied the pastor on home and hospital visits, did a little teaching at the elementary school, and enjoyed dinner and a trip to Mt. Rushmore with one of the St. Paul members.

The home visits were especially meaningful to Grant. “I enjoyed every single visit,” Grant said. “It was great talking to the members there about what’s going on in their lives and sitting through a little devotion with them and Pastor.”

He also enjoyed the classroom visit, where he helped teach upper-grade religion class and gave a devotion to the first and second graders. “It was very enjoyable to talk with the kids and tell them about Jesus—even the little boppers,” Grant said. “There’s nothing better.”

Grant and Pastor Hemmelman played tag with the kids at recess too. “The kids loved us running around,” he said. “You’re never too old for recess.”

The best part, though, was just being in an actual congregation. “It was cool just being out of the classroom, in ‘the field,’ seeing what it’s all about. That has to be one of my favorite things about EME for preseminary students—it gets you that taste of ministry, a taste of what we’re getting into.”

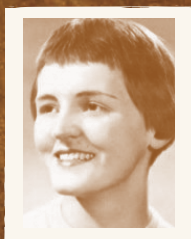
**Emphasis on Early:** A “taste” is just the right term. The EME is not an extended, culminating experience occurring shortly before a new pastor accepts his first assignment. It’s just a taste, a glimpse, that occurs in the student’s very first year at MLC, year 1 of an 8-year journey.

Pastor Hemmelman notes that an early experience is especially beneficial for students who don’t have family members who are pastors and so may know very little about the day-to-day life of a pastor. “It’s also good for young people to see different kinds of churches and ministries,” he said. “I think it helps them to be well-rounded and to be prepared for whatever setting the Lord puts them in.”

### **Emphasis on Encouragement:**

Pastor Hemmelman remembers well his own journey to the pulpit—a journey that began at MLC in 2012 and ended with his seminary graduation in 2020. He knew that his main message to Grant would be one of encouragement for the journey.

“I just wanted to encourage Grant to keep going. There’s a long path ahead of him to become a pastor, but it’s an enjoyable path and the goal at the end is worth it. There are ups and downs, of course, but it is truly an incredible thing to be able to bring God’s Word to his people.”



**Sandra Brehmer**  
DMLC 1960  
Milwaukee



**Robert Kramer**  
DMLC 1980  
Lannon WI



**Sarah Gorm**  
MLC 2005  
Sheridan WY



**Thomas Bartz**  
NWC 1970  
Appleton WI

Grant appreciated the kind words and caught Pastor Hemmelman's enthusiasm. "Pastor Hemmelman is very personable and encouraging," he said. "He taught me that it is essential to know the people you're serving, to be personable and build a connection with them. And it's also crucial to know and be sound in the Scriptures."

This echoes what Grant said he'd already learned from **Professor Aaron Dolan MLC '03, WLS '07** at MLC—"that as we prepare for the ministry, we must know how to do three things: 1) know God's Word, 2) know the people, and 3) share God's Word with the people."

An important facet of Pastor Hemmelman's encouragement was to point out to Grant that he truly has gifts for ministry. "Grant has an innate ability to connect with people. He's outgoing and personable. He did some readings in our worship services, and seemed very comfortable and calm speaking in front of people. His musical abilities will be a blessing to the church as well."

All that encouragement hit home. Grant left Rapid City with renewed energy for his journey to the pulpit. "I'd like to thank Pastor Hemmelman and the members of Rapid City for hosting me while I learned about ministry," he said. "I enjoyed every moment out there and look forward to seeing you all again."



Pastor James Hemmelman wants to encourage first-year Grant Klas to keep going on the road to pulpit ministry—a road that's long but well worth it.



As part of his EME at St. Paul-Rapid City, Grant Klas led a devotion for primary-grade children at the Lutheran elementary school.



**Bethel Kuckhahn**  
DMLC 1990  
Gibbon MN



**Richard Cody**  
DMLC 1990  
Lake Mills WI



**Jill Anding**  
MLC 2010  
Neillsville WI



**Daniel Albrecht**  
MLC 2010  
Winneconne WI

# MINISTRY MENTORS

## New Teacher Induction: 10 Years of

### Could You Be a Mentor?

Mentors must have 3+ years of teaching experience; demonstrate competence in instruction, assessment, and classroom management; possess strong relational gifts; and complete mentor training through MLC. If you'd like to serve young teachers in this important way, contact Dr. Jonathan Schaefer at [schaejfj@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:schaejfj@mlc-wels.edu) or visit [mlc-wels.edu/nti/become-a-mentor](http://mlc-wels.edu/nti/become-a-mentor).

### “Let’s Not Burn Out Our New Teachers!”

Find tips for congregations and schools in this article by Dr. Jon Schaefer on our *Issues in Lutheran Education* online blog.



For the first two years of their teaching ministry, a new teacher is not alone. After they are assigned to their first call, they also receive a trained mentor. This mentor is a fellow teacher who walks closely with them, making weekly contact, scheduling monthly face-to-face communications, and doing classroom observations. The mentor is not there to evaluate. They are there to answer questions and offer encouragement, providing a place of trust and transparency to foster the new teacher’s spiritual and professional growth.

We call this mentor program New Teacher Induction (NTI). It’s a partnership between WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools and Martin Luther College, and it’s led by **Dr. Jonathan Schaefer MLC ’02**, at MLC. Dr. Schaefer explains that a two-year mentorship like this is key to early teacher success. “Education in the 21st century is vastly different from 20 years ago,” he says, “and the dynamics of teaching, classroom management, and home-school relationships are increasingly complex. The ‘sink or swim’ method is damaging to today’s schools and teachers.”

The damage is clear in the statistics: In the 1980s, new WELS teachers who left the

profession numbered 287; in the 2000s, those who left numbered 867. To be sure, some leave the classroom for natural reasons, such as wanting to stay home with a new baby. But the number of resignations is stark enough to cause concern. That’s where NTI comes in. NTI mentors support teachers in their tenuous first years, accelerating their effectiveness. “Your mentor does not just enter your classroom,” Dr. Schaefer explains. “They enter your ministry. They walk with you, encourage you, foster your confidence, and help you to lay down roots in that congregation, that school, so that it becomes your new faith family.”

And research backs it up. High-quality induction programs like ours definitely enhance teacher retention. Of the 303 teachers who engaged in NTI, only 8% resigned for personal reasons. Meanwhile, the National Education Association says about 30 percent of new teachers resign within their first five years. But the program does more than merely keep teachers. It keeps them *confident*. Confident young teachers infuse energy into the school, introduce sound and innovative teaching practices, and raise academic success in students, which satisfies their parents too.

In addition to the one-on-one mentorships, NTI has begun providing teachers with a way to gather in professional learning groups based on grade level, content area, or ministry context. Primary grade teachers in urban contexts, for example, or WELS high school music teachers may gather and discuss ideas and best practices. It’s just another way that MLC and WELS are building up these professionals who have dedicated their lives to serving their Savior and their students.

MLC 2020 graduates and their spouses are invited to rejuvenate, renew, and reconnect at a retreat at the Drury Hotel in Downtown Nashville in June.



**Carolyn Roenneburg**  
DMLC 1970  
Brodhead WI



**Stephen Pankow**  
MLC 2015  
Cape Coral FL



**Audrey Gunn**  
MLC 2010  
Phoenix



**James Martens**  
DMLC 1965  
Jefferson WI



# Helping Teachers Succeed

## Meet Stephanie Ham and Her Mentor, Joanna Smith

When **Stephanie Ham** MLC '23 (*on the left*) began teaching at Mt. Olive in Overland Park, Kansas, in fall 2023, she was assigned an experienced mentor, **Joanna Smith** MLC '09, '16 (*on the right*), a teacher at Trinity in Hoskins, Nebraska. We asked Stephanie and Joanna to tell us in their own words what the mentorship has been like.

### JOANNA

**Why She Became a Mentor:** I love to help fellow teachers, especially as they go through the struggles of their first years of teaching. I had many supportive people in my life during my first years of teaching and wanted to pass that on to other new teachers.

**Her Goals with Her Mentees:** One of my goals is assuring them that they have someone in their corner to support and encourage them, not just with teaching, but as a person too. Moving to a new place—with new people, new faculty, and a new culture—can be extremely overwhelming, but knowing they have a person who is willing to answer lots of questions and be a sounding board can be a tremendous blessing. They go through lots of ups and downs during their first years. If I can help them navigate their struggles, guide them towards solutions, and help celebrate their victories, then I get just as much out of the mentoring partnership as they do.

**And She Prays!** I also pray for my mentees, especially when I know things are weighing on their mind or they have a stressful situation they're working through. A simple text of "I'm praying for you!" can help the new teacher know they're not alone and the Lord is with them.

**What She Sees in Stephanie:** Stephanie loves her students! I never had to encourage her to build relationships with her students. She naturally sees that each is unique and wants the best for them. She advocates for them and pushes them to do well, but also gives them the support they need to achieve goals. I've enjoyed watching her become more confident in the classroom and in who she is as a teacher.



### STEPHANIE

**What Joanna Has Meant to Her:** Having Joanna as my mentor has been incredibly helpful. Sometimes as a first-year teacher, it can be confusing what to do in certain situations or to know what's normal. Joanna is always there for me whenever I need help or even if I just need to talk to her about something. She listens, gives advice, and encourages me with God's Word. She's taught me that it's okay to have a bad day of teaching—that I can reflect, modify, and grow on these days. And on the great days of teaching, I can reflect on what went well and use it in future lessons.

**Classroom Visits Are the Best:** Although Joanna and I live in different states, I have the best opportunity to have Joanna visit my school and watch me teach. It sounds intimidating, but it's quite the opposite. After school, we'll talk about the day and she'll give me encouragement.

**She's Grateful:** The NTI program has been an incredible experience for me. I can't thank MLC enough for providing this program to new teachers—and Joanna Smith for being my mentor.



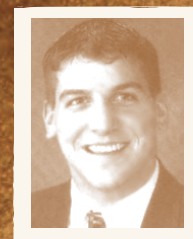
**Rebecca Hennig**  
MLC 2000  
Campbellsport  
WI



**Anthony Allard**  
NWC 1995  
Kimberly WI



**Naomi Welke**  
DMLC 1975  
Watertown  
WI



**David Scharf**  
MLC 2000  
West Allis WI

# MINISTRY MENTORS

## On Campus

Mentoring for ministry happens right here every day. Our professors consider mentorship an important aspect of their calling. It's all part of what we sometimes call "the hidden curriculum" here at MLC—the gospel-saturated culture that the Spirit uses to shape hearts and minds for ministry. We asked a few graduates to look back and tell us about a professor who made a positive impact on them while they were here. Here's what they said:



### **Dr. Keith Wessel**

showed me what real pastoral kindness looked like. He served as my Latin, Greek, Patristics, and Philosophy

professor. His gentle attitude and warm demeanor kept me calm, especially when school felt stressful. Now that I'm a pastor and teach religion to future pastors, I try to emulate his welcoming attitude.

### **Rev. Jeremiah Wallander**

*MLC '19, WLS '23*

*Tutor, Michigan Lutheran Seminary*



**Dr. Cindy Whaley** had the same smile on her face every single day, no matter what was going on. I also admired her obvious passion

for teaching! It was contagious when you were in her class. She taught me that the curriculum is important, but the relationships you build with your students are really what sets you apart.

### **Ethan Aguilar** MLC '22

*Teacher,*

*Carlsbad Christian Academy-Carlsbad CA*



### **Dr. Lawrence Olson**

was a huge influence with his care and passion for ministry. He used practical examples of ministry in the classroom

to prepare me for real life outside MLC, and he helped me develop my skills and strengths in my calling.

### **Nathan Graumann** MLC '19

*Staff minister,*

*St. Paul-Fort Atkinson WI*



### **Dr. James Carlovsky**

was always so great at not just teaching his students the math content, but also teaching them how to

teach. He also took the time to connect with students beyond the classroom. I hope to replicate that kind of care for students throughout their lives. What stuck with me the most, though, was that he started each class with a Bible passage and expanded on the passage for a few minutes—an idea I stole for my own classroom. It is incredible how God's Word is living and breathing, even in the first five minutes of a class.



### **Professor Rae**

**Fredrich** has also been an incredible mentor for me. She took some very tough concepts and made them easy

to follow and then easy to teach to others—exactly what I would hope happens in my own classroom. Beyond that, she was always sacrificing time and energy to make her classes fun and filled with variety (e.g., her scavenger hunts).

### **Moriah Hackbarth** MLC '20

*Teacher,*

*Winnebago Lutheran Academy*



### **Instructor Kathy**

**Wurster** was my vocal instructor for three years at MLC. Under her instruction, my voice grew so much!

I feel more confident now than I ever have about singing in church. It's inspiring how often she uses her voice to serve MLC at various concerts and events! Not only is she an inspiration professionally, but she's become a great friend to me. One of the great blessings of entering the public ministry is becoming friends and colleagues with the people who taught you the most.

### **Jennie Boeder** MLC '19

*Piano teacher,*

*Michigan Lutheran Seminary*



### **Dr. Jon Roux**

gave me the confidence and motivation to be a literacy teacher. He effectively equipped me with the knowledge and

skills to teach reading and writing. He also demonstrated a strong love and passion for ministry. His words and actions exemplified a servant's attitude, one that is needed in future called workers. He shared stories about the joys and challenges of the ministry, and he always connected the opportunity we have to teach others about their Savior.

### **Josh Wong** MLC '21

*Teacher,*

*Risen Savior Christian Academy-Pooler GA*



## Student Ambassadors: Mini-Mentors for the Ministry Journey

Our Student Ambassadors (*pictured here in downtown New Ulm*) make it their job to be mini-mentors to high school students thinking about college. They give campus tours, talk with students at Focus on Ministry events, help in the Admissions Office, and shine their lights in a hundred ways! So . . . what exactly do they tell high school students with questions? Here's a sampling of their advice.

### **Izzy Steidl** (*St. Paul-Muskego WI*)

We're here to be lights of Christ in others' lives and to spread God's Word to all people. No matter what occupation you choose, you'll be able to serve God and bring glory to him. Ultimately, you get to choose how you want to do that. God has amazing plans for you, whether that is coming to MLC or going to a different college.

### **Connor Heckendorf** (*Light of the Valleys-Reno NV*)

If you're contemplating being a pastor, teacher, or staff minister, go out and try evangelizing. Whether that comes in the form of a mission trip with your church or school, or just trying to talk to a coworker or neighbor about Jesus, just get a taste of the joy and fulfillment that comes from sharing Jesus with others.

### **Hailey Rice** (*Living Hope-Commerce City CO*)

When I was trying to figure out college, I was so stressed. I felt that if I didn't know, I'd be a failure. But you have so much life ahead, and you will find out what your thing is. MLC is a welcoming place. If you're considering MLC, if it's a thought on your mind, take the chance and see what MLC has to offer!

### **Luke Latzke** (*Trinity-Crete IL*)

Look to those before you and see the good things they've done. Hebrews 13:7 says, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

I looked to some pastors and teachers and realized how awesome their lives were because they lived them for God, and I wanted to be a part of that.

**HIGH SCHOOLERS!**

**ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT COLLEGE?**

**▶ WHAT ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE?**

  
MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

MLC is the WELS College of Ministry, where students from all over the country come to prepare for ministry as WELS pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.

Can we send you information about MLC? Sign up for our free e-newsletter, *Knight Watch Weekly*, which gives you a weekly peek into campus life. You can unsubscribe at any time, of course.



  
 Sign Up!


mlc-wels.edu  

# Focus On *Finances*

## Lightening the Load

*The numbers are in, and the news is good!*

For six straight years, MLC graduates have borrowed less money to pay for their education at MLC.

### MLC Average Debt **DOWN:** ↓

The average debt of our graduates has decreased six years in a row, with borrowers in this year's graduating class borrowing \$802 less, on average, than borrowers in the class of 2023. Over the course of those six years, the average debt has decreased more than \$4,500!

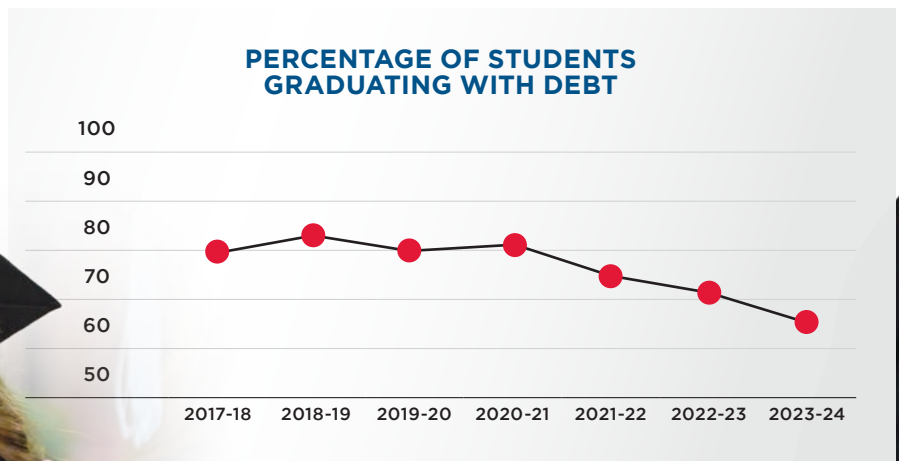
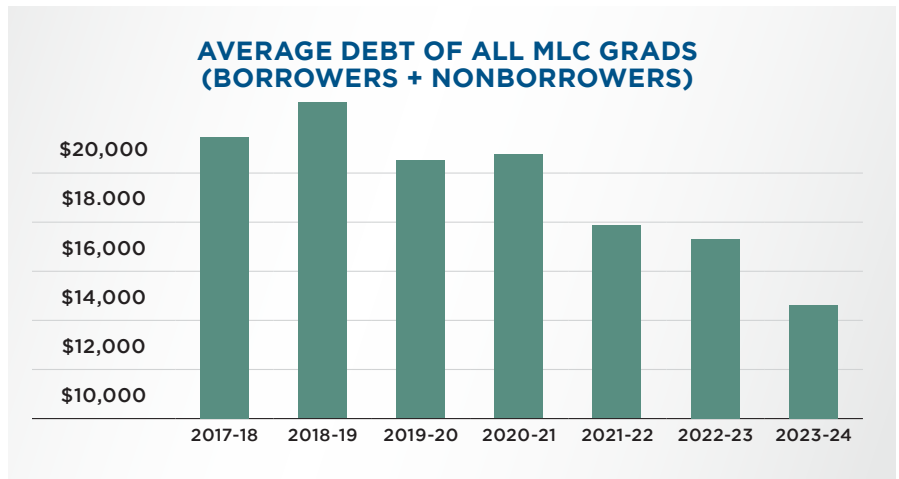
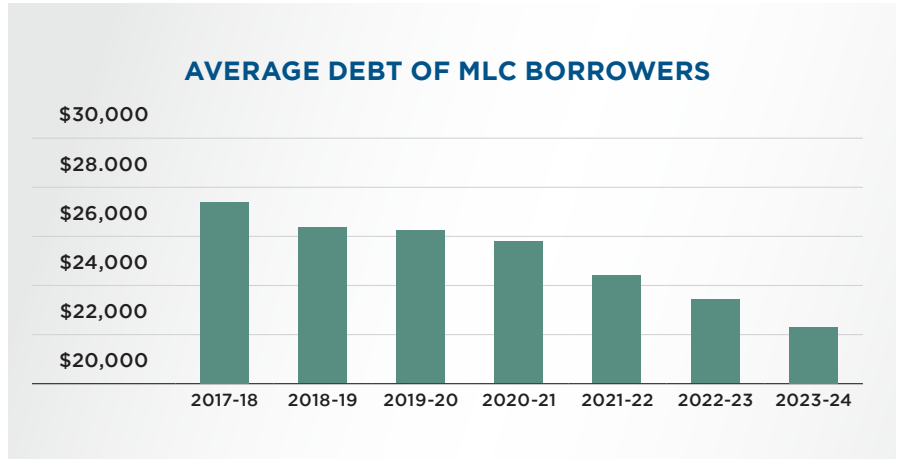
### MLC Number of Borrowers **DOWN:** ↓

About 40% of the 2024 graduates took out no government loans at all. This is the lowest percentage of debt-free graduates since 2003.

### MLC First-Year Enrollment **UP:** ↑

This year's enrollment of new first-year students is up. Why do we mention that here? Because we know that the cost of college is one of the deciding factors for some prospective students. We're so thankful that as costs go down, we see enrollment going up!

As you know, reducing student debt is one of the primary objectives in our strategic plan, *Pursuing Excellence Under the Cross*. Please know that we'll keep partnering with parents and students to make college as affordable as possible.



2024 graduates Paige Biesterfeld and Katie Tauscher

## How does MLC Compare Nationally?

Let's compare MLC to all private, nonprofit universities in the country. These are the official figures for the average debt of all 2024 graduates, borrowers and nonborrowers.

**Martin Luther College: \$13,425**  
**All U.S. private, nonprofit universities: \$33,910**

Sources: EducationData.org, Office of Federal Student Aid

2024 graduates Jenna Boggs, Olivia Krueger, and Matthias Borgwardt



## Your Gifts Are Lightening the Load for MLC Students!

Thank you, donors, for the **new scholarships** you've established at MLC!

Thank you, congregations with MLC students, for the **tuition grants** you've designated for your students through the Congregational Partner Grant Program (CPGP)!

Thank you, congregations with no MLC students, for the gifts you've given to the **CPGP matching fund**. *We're looking at you, Our Savior-Strongsville (Cleveland, Ohio! You may not have MLC students here this year, but you chose to give more than \$3,000 to help MLC match other CPGP grants! Thank you for being the match!*

Thank you, all friends of MLC, for **every gift** to student financial assistance.

We thank you—and we thank our generous God, who inspires you to give!

## MLC Tops National Ranking

Not only is MLC cost-effective, but we're also ranked #1 in the entire nation for career preparation. We thank God that our graduates feel well prepared for their ministry careers!

*This Just In from the Wall Street Journal*

### TOP 10 PREPARATION FOR CAREER

The schools among the WSJ/College Pulse 2025 Best Colleges in the U.S. that scored highest for career preparation in a survey of their students and recent alumni:

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Martin Luther College         | 6. University of Notre Dame            |
| 2. Babson College                | 7. Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology |
| 3. Hampden-Sydney College        | 8. Samford University                  |
| 4. Washington and Lee University | 9. The Master's University             |
| 5. Loyola University Maryland    | 10. Kettering University               |

Source: WSJ/College Pulse 2025 Best Colleges in the U.S.

# New Faith and New Vocation

## *CBE Opens New Pathway to Ministry*

We really have little Aria to thank for all of this.

Aria is the daughter of **Harley Kujak**, and it's because of Aria's faith and encouragement that her mom is now enrolled in MLC's first Competency-Based Education (CBE) cohort.

It started when 3-year-old Aria got a gift from her Oma: a Bible. "Ever since then," her mom said, "she's wanted to go to church. She loved learning about the different stories of the Bible and how they are still relevant to today's society."

Harley, however, wasn't quite ready at that point. "I just didn't know at the time how much I needed Jesus."

**A New Church:** Fast-forward several years. Aria was going into third grade when Harley and her soon-to-be husband, Tyler, decided they did not want her in a public school. At the recommendation of a friend, they toured nearby St. John's Lutheran School in Sparta, Wisconsin—and loved it. "It was a smaller school, and there was a family feel to it."

They visited the church as well and began taking classes with Pastor **Jonathan Hackbarth** MLC '96, WLS '01, who, they say, has had a profound impact on their lives. Aria, of course, could not have been happier.

As their spiritual journey continued, Harley and Aria were baptized, Harley and Tyler were married, and all three are now happily involved members at St. John's.

**A New Career Direction:** God had new career plans in place for Harley as well. She'd been working as a social worker and was pursuing her master's degree when she was suddenly let go. But what a blessing it turned out to be. She began working as an aide at Bright Beginnings, the early childhood ministry at St. John's, and found it a wonderful fit.

"I started falling in love with teaching the children," she said. She worked also as co-lead teacher for 3K and 4K at another early childhood ministry—First Light Learning Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin—and she taught Sunday school at St. John's. All of it led to a realization: what she really wanted to do with her life was be a Lutheran elementary school teacher.

"I have always loved the idea of being a teacher," she said. "When I was originally in college at Viterbo University

in 2012, I took a test that indicated I would be good as an elementary education teacher, social studies teacher, or early childhood educator."

The idea seemed farfetched at the time, but as she was working with kids at both preschools, sharing the gospel with them and nurturing their intellectual and spiritual development, she realized how much she loved it.

With the full backing of Tyler—"he was extremely supportive and loving, like he always is," she said—she decided to pursue the vocation of WELS elementary school teacher. "The thought of teaching regular arithmetic, English, and history sounds like exactly what I want to do, but additionally I can teach about our Lord's love."

**A New College:** Where does someone like Harley go when she'd like to change careers as an adult, but she doesn't want to move her entire family so she can go to college? She calls MLC.

Specifically, she talked to **Dr. Nichole LaGrow** about the new Competency-Based Education program—and it fit her situation perfectly.

It allows her to study online, which means her family can stay right where they are. She can keep teaching in the WELS preschools, Tyler can stay with his employer, and her daughter can continue in the dance, cheerleading, and drama activities she loves so much.

It's also a much less expensive option than a traditional college. The entire program, she says, will cost less than just one year of her education at Viterbo.

And her work in the preschools will help her achieve competency faster. "I've learned so much in the few years I've worked in a school. I know there's more to it than just that, but the competency program does recognize some of the work I've done." Harley will certainly apply her knowledge in some courses and may earn credit by experience for other courses.

**A New Path to Ministry:** Harley is now enrolled in the first cohort at MLC, working hard on the required theology courses. Her congregation recognizes the value of her contributions to their school and is lending financial assistance.

It's early, but so far she loves it, and she's very excited about what lies ahead. "I really am going to enjoy learning more about education. I'm also excited to learn more about our Lord and Savior. That is probably something I am most looking forward to."



Harley Kujak with her husband, Tyler, and her daughter, Aria. “If it weren’t for my daughter coming into the world and for my husband being extremely supportive, I would never be where I am now.”

For Harley, it’s not just a program. It’s the beginning of a whole new life.

“I can finally find a career that makes me happy,” she said.

And as she shares the Word with children in her WELS school, she remembers that it’s Aria’s love of Jesus that led her here. “Have faith like a child,” she says—“that’s a statement that really resonates with our family.”

## Is Competency-Based Education for You?

- YES – if you’re a second-career adult who wants to be a WELS teacher but cannot uproot your family and come to New Ulm.
- YES – if you want to use courses completed at other colleges toward your degree.
- YES – if you want to use your life experiences and job skills as part of your learning.
- YES – if you want to continue working while you earn college credit.
- YES – if you want to engage in a flexibly paced program.

MLC’s CBE program is an alternate path to the teaching ministry that may be a perfect fit for you, your family, your life!

***Our fall cohort is in full swing, but we still have a few openings in our spring cohort.***

**Contact Dr. Nichole LaGrow for more information: [lagrowna@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:lagrowna@mlc-wels.edu) / 507.354.8221 x205**

## **The first cohort is now enrolled!**

### **Thank you for your gifts to Competency-Based Education!**

It’s your generous gifts that have gotten us this far! We’d especially like to thank the anonymous donor who made a substantial gift to provide financial assistance to CBE students at MLC!

God willing, the program will be self-sustaining in a few years, but not just yet. If you’d still like to give, please contact VP for Mission Advancement **Mark Maurice** at [mauricme@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:mauricme@mlc-wels.edu)/507.354.8221.



# Thalassa Prize 2024

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.

## 2024 Winner: Embroidered Garments

Emily Rider MLC '18  
Southeast Asia



I watched this 94-year-old Hmong woman meticulously paint her designs on the fabric in front of her with a hand that had undoubtedly done this thousands of times. She and the other ladies of the village developed an intricate way of creating purses, tapestries, and clothing out of the hemp plants that grow all throughout the fields around them. They collect the hemp, split it, weave it together, soften it, and form beautiful pieces that they sell or give to those in need. The process takes days to make just one item. As I spoke with the women in my broken Vietnamese, I learned about the detailed care they put into the process they repeated every single day.

There was so much running through my mind as I left the women to continue their work: Don't they get tired of doing the same thing over and over? Is it worth the hours of painstaking labor for the outcome, as beautiful as it may be?

And of course the big one: Has anyone told these wonderful people about their Savior?

Their Savior thoughtfully formed each of these women with his own hands. Their Savior painstakingly adorned them in clothing only he was worthy to wear. Their Savior loved them enough to leave his throne and give his life that they may wear the robe of righteousness and stand confidently in front of the King on the last day.

By God's grace, their Savior is our Savior too.

*"In embroidered garments she is led to the King"*  
(Psalm 45:14).

Emily and her husband, Jesse Rider MLC '19, are evangelists in Southeast Asia through the Friends Network. MLC's Cultural Engagement Center awarded Emily \$1,000, half of which she designated to the Friends Network. This is the 18th annual Thalassa Prize awarded by MLC.

MLC has now begun accepting submissions for the 19th annual **Thalassa Prize**.

**DEADLINE:** April 30, 2025 | **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:** [mlc-wels.edu/Thalassa](http://mlc-wels.edu/Thalassa)

**ALL PAST WINNERS:** [mlc-wels.edu/Thalassa](http://mlc-wels.edu/Thalassa)





**2024 Entry:**  
**Clothe Yourself in Love** excerpt  
Rachel Ihlenfeldt MLC '22  
Grenada, West Indies

Independence Day is a day to celebrate national pride. In Grenada, the day before is National Colours Day, in which everybody is encouraged to wear the Grenadian “ice, green, and gold.” At my school, we celebrate National Colours Day with a big breakfast of saltfish souse, bakes, fish cakes, and cocoa tea and have a special assembly featuring songs, dances, and poems that represent their Grenadian culture. The children love the opportunity to don their nation’s colours and participate in the traditions that make their tiny island country so unique.

As Christians, we might not have a set of colours that we can wear to demonstrate that we are all in the family of believers. However, Colossians 3:14 says, “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.” . . .

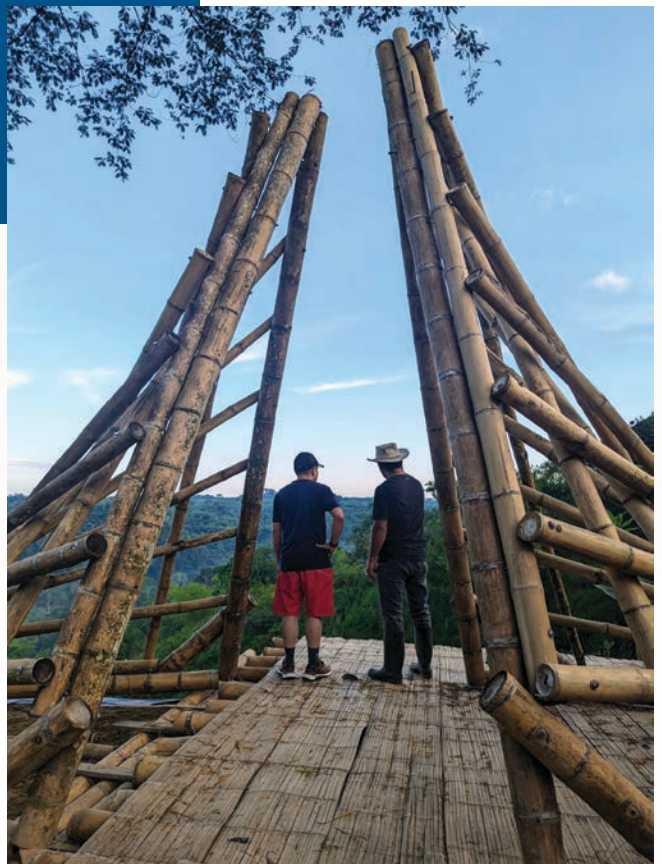
*Rachel served in Grenada from July 2022 to May 2024 as an elementary school teacher and as a part-time ministry assistant, as well as a volunteer with Kingdom Workers’ special needs ministry.*

**2024 Entry:**  
**Different Vocations, Same Purpose**  
excerpt  
Sofia Spiegelberg Bitter MLC '21  
Medellin, Colombia

While visiting a finca (small farm) in the countryside of Colombia with my pastor, we had the chance to visit with a farmer, who showed us around his farm. Could these two men switch lives and succeed in the life of the other? In all honesty, probably not. My pastor was raised in the hustle and bustle of the big city. The finca owner grew up roaming through coffee fields and milking cows. Without training, support, and guidance, neither man would survive in the other’s vocation. However, each man is serving the Lord in the role they have been given, one as a pastor, one as a farmer.

God does not create us to be the same. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” . . .

*Sofia served Santisima Trinidad Iglesia Luterana in Medellin, Colombia, where her husband, Jacob, was vicar from July 2023 to August 2024. She also volunteered for Academia Cristo, the WELS world mission to Latin America.*



here on the

hill



### Welcome, First-Years!

The RAs number 42, but these five wanted to be sure the first-year students and their parents felt very welcome at Orientation.

### Can I Help You with That?

It was all hands on deck during Orientation Weekend, with resident assistants (RAs) competing to see who could carry the heaviest loads for the first-years who were moving in. Some new students and their parents were surprised when their helpful RA turned out to be none other than **President Gurgel**.



### Kicking Off the Year

"One of the great things about going to MLC is the incredible Christian support system you have," says senior **Lilianne Zimpelmann** (*Immanuel-Manitowoc WI*). As an RA in Augustana Hall, she makes it her job to encourage the younger students who are just kicking off the year.





## Football and Fellowship

In July, MLC Knights football hosted 200+ high school athletes and nearly 30 coaches for team camp. Participants from St. Croix Lutheran Academy (*pictured*), Fox Valley LHS, and Manitowoc LHS stayed on campus and played football in the Bowl, on the practice field, and in the Betty Kohn Fieldhouse.

“Our camp is about football and fellowship, with a dash of recruitment,” said MLC Head Coach **Paul Huebner** MLC '06. “As much fun as the players have, the coaches might enjoy it even more, as many of them are alumni of MLC, DMLC, or NWC. And it’s a great recruitment tool. Each year I’m blessed to share thoughts on who we are and what we do at Martin Luther College, and how all those young men might consider pursuing public ministry while also continuing to play the game of football.”



## First, We Worship

**Caleb Carlovsky** (*St. Paul-New Ulm MN*) and **Luke Wegner** (*St. Marcus-Milwaukee*) participate in the opening service processional.

## New Beginnings

The opening service saw five new faculty installed by President Gurgel, including (*pictured from left*) **Dr. Susan Decker**, **Jon Hermanson**, and **JoElyn Krohn**.



## A Swinging Success

The 32nd annual MLC Golf Classic brought together 114 golfers and raised **over \$30,000** for student scholarships and library study rooms. This event sponsored by the New Ulm community has raised more than \$1 million for the college. We’re so grateful!

*Pictured: The winning foursome: Dale Polzin, Brian Messer, Paul Polzin, and Nate Struffert.*



## Stay Out of the Kitchen!

MLC students have joined the pickleball craze, with the new club meeting just a couple days after school started.

here on the

hill



## Check Out That Stat

3.847. That's not a newsworthy stat for points or rebounds, but it's an incredible stat for grade point average. Our Knights women's basketball team boasted a team GPA of 3.847, the second highest DIII GPA in the nation. (They were edged out by the 3.856 GPA of Williams College-MA).

MLC women are known for their scholarship. For four consecutive years, they've landed in the top 10 in the nation, taking second place in 2021-22 and third in 2022-2023.

"I'm very proud of our players," says Head Coach **Dan Gawrisch** MLC '08. "Balancing academics and athletics takes extraordinary effort, commitment, time management, and responsibility. These are important attributes for future teachers and coaches. This shows how dedicated our athletes are on and off the court, in season and out of season, using their gifts to the fullest to God's glory."

## Golf and Life

Glow-in-the-Dark golf was just one highlight of the 2024 Golf and Life Camp hosted by MLC Coach **Matt Pearson** MLC '97.

Sixteen campers from 10 high schools teed up at four different courses to hone their skills during the day. In the evenings, Coach Pearson led devotions, and the group talked about skills important for both golf and life.

"Camp was fantastic!" he said. "Mornings were reserved for the skills clinic, afternoons were reserved for on-the-course instruction, and in the evenings, campers had fun with free time (hello, water park!) and learned about our focus values for golf and life: courtesy, perseverance, and confidence. The cool thing was that golfers of all abilities got 1% better each day."





### Preserving the Trust

What gifts has God entrusted to you? Your talents, your physical health, your relationships, the gospel itself—how can you best use them in your faith-life and ministry?

These were some of the foundational questions **President Gurgel** and guest presenters asked senior education and staff ministry majors—like **Marissa Zaye** (*Our Savior-Bylas AZ*, pictured)—at the second annual “Preserving the Trust” retreat in Bloomington over Labor Day weekend.

The seniors came back to campus excited about their final year of ministry training, including their student teaching and staff ministry internships. In hand were personal plans related to healthy habits, positive mindsets, and development of their gifts—all founded on their identity in Christ.

### National Champion

Mason Cox's .469 batting average put him at the top of the Knights, the top of the conference, and the top of the nation. That's right. This 2024 grad was the national DIII batting champ, edging out players at Greensboro College-NC and Lawrence University-WI who both notched .468 averages.

“I'm just super grateful that God has given me these talents to use—and the teammates and family that helped me do it,” he said.



### Everyone's Ready to Learn!

Our early childhood majors do their student teaching right down the road—at the MLC Early Childhood Learning Center. This semester, five student teachers will be working with 67 little ones—including these cuties—under the guidance of the ECLC lead teachers and the MLC supervisors. The best part? Telling them about Jesus!



### Praise the Lord!

Students in the Worship Ensemble are adding beauty and variety to our musical offerings in chapel. With the psalmist we say, “Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals!”



# Summer Is For



## MLC Daylight Team Reaches Out to Community

We call it a win-win. Through the MLC Daylight program, students volunteer at distant congregations, assisting with outreach and worship events—think: soccer Bible camps, vacation Bible schools, and Easter for Kids. The congregations receive energetic, enthusiastic volunteer hours from MLC students, and the students gain valuable hands-on ministry experience.

In early July, a Daylight trip took four MLC students to Divine Peace in Rockwall, Texas (pictured by sign): **Zachary Pausma** (St. Luke-Oakfield WI), **Isabel Brown** (Abiding Word-Houston), **Preston Ballentine** (Abiding Peace-Simpsonville SC), and **Laura Kopplin** (Divine Peace-Rockwall TX).

They assisted Pastor **Gunnar Ledermann** MLC '11, WLS '16 and his congregation with outreach efforts surrounding the 4th of July parade, which just happens to run past the church.



“We had games (pictured), crafts, cookie decorating, and temporary tattoos available for kids,” explains Laura. “We invited families in to use our restrooms and enjoy the air-conditioning before the parade began. No one likes waiting in the Texas summer heat!”

While in Texas, the MLC team also handed out 800 VBS flyers for the Garland campus of Divine Peace, and they sang in the Sunday worship service (pictured).



“Pastor Gunnar opened our eyes to the many different ways to be involved in the community,” Isabel said. “He took us to the Rockwall Children’s Advocacy Center, the Meals on Wheels and Senior Services Center, and the Rockwall Area Chamber of Commerce to show us how we could use these resources in our future ministries.”

“Throughout all this,” Preston added, “we learned how important it is to connect with the community surrounding the church. You can’t get anyone in the door if you hide behind that same door. Real connections have to be created to share God’s Word with others.”

Zachary agreed. “God welcomes all into his church, and we can be a small part of that while on the earth. It’s an amazing blessing to share his Word with others and let the Holy Spirit do his work.”

*This summer 52 students assisted 16 ministries around the United States and in London, bringing the total number of 2023-2024 Daylight participants to 100. The vast majority of MLC students do at least one Daylight trip during their four years at MLC. Although a few long-term experiences are paid positions, most are volunteer.*



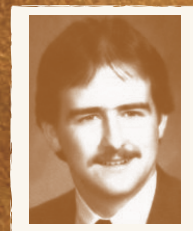
**Gretchen Boldt**  
DMLC 1965  
Morton Grove IL



**Thomas Lindloff**  
NWC 1975  
Neillsville WI



**Annette Scharf**  
MLC 2015  
Hot Springs Village AR



**Mark Franck**  
NWC 1985  
Livingston MT

# Serving

## MLC Ambassadors Recruit at Youth Rally

A handful of happy MLC Student Ambassadors spent a few days in June at the 2024 WELS International Youth Rally. There, at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, they connected with some of the 2,200 teens in attendance.



MLC Student Ambassadors invited high school students to stop by the MLC “Riding the Wave” booth and talk about gospel ministry. And yes, that’s Martin and Katie Luther in beach apparel in the photo booth. (Gospel ministry is serious business, but we have a lot of fun too!) Ambassadors from left: **Kassi Aguilar**, **Izzy Steidl**, **Sarah Vance**, **Hailey Rice**, and **Kay Prigge**.

**Kassi Aguilar** (*Cross of Glory-Peoria AZ*), **Izzy Steidl** (*St. Paul-Muskego WI*), **Sarah Vance** (*St. Paul-New Ulm MN*), **Hailey Rice** (*Living Hope-Commerce City CO*), and **Kay Prigge** (*Faith-Rising City NE*) are five members of a larger team that represents MLC and assist the Admissions Office in a million ways—including informal mentoring of high school students who are considering whether full-time gospel ministry is in their future.

At the Youth Rally, the team set up games with prizes and ran a photo booth for the students there. “If kids or parents had any questions about MLC,” said Ambassador **Hailey Rice**,

“we were there at the table to answer them. We had a lot of good conversations. A lot of kids were saying how thankful they were to be with so many kids their age worshipping Jesus together and having such a fun time.”

Ambassador **Sarah Vance** loved connecting with those students, “learning about them and getting to share our love for MLC and our passion for its purpose. Four days of making friends and sharing my love for the purpose of MLC—what could be better than that?!”

## MLC Musician Fills Worship Internship

This summer, **Joseph Panning** (*St. Paul-Litchfield MN*) served as a worship intern at Amazing Grace-Amarillo TX. He was thrilled to serve at a church far from Minnesota—a place where he could do outreach and use his musical gifts too.

Joe says he gained invaluable practical experience through the wide range of experiences: teaching piano, planning church events, compiling worship materials, working with worship technology, leading Bible studies, giving devotions, and using his own performance gifts—voice, piano, and saxophone—in worship.

The best part? Sharing Christ. He canvassed for the church, worked at food drives, and met up with new friends over coffee whenever he could. “I regularly got to meet people who had never heard the gospel, or hadn’t heard the truth about what Jesus did for us,” he said. “That was the most rewarding experience of all.”



**Sophia Birner**  
MLC 2020  
Lusaka, Zambia



**Dana Dudley**  
NWC 1970  
Lansing MI



**Amy Arnhold**  
MLC 2010  
Saginaw MI



**Joel Seifert**  
MLC 2000  
Midland MI

# “The Most Rewarding Job”

## *Kortney Behnke Is First Graduate in Accelerated MS-Special Education*

**Kortney Behnke** knows exactly why she pursued special education as her major—and her vocation.

Back in elementary school, she watched as a family in her church had to make difficult educational choices. “They had multiple children with various special needs,” she says. “Some of the kids attended our WELS school, but the other kids had to attend local public schools because our WELS school didn’t have the resources needed to support them.”

That reality hit home hard. “It broke my heart to see kids who sat in the front pew of church every week not be able to receive the same Christian education that their siblings got.”

The heartbreak led to a heartfelt decision. “I decided to pursue special education through MLC because I wanted to work toward the goal of bringing the Word of God to all students, no matter their needs.”

**Her Major at MLC:** Kortney did more than enroll in MLC’s special ed major. She also enrolled in our 4 + 1 Accelerated Master’s Program—and became the first graduate of that program in May 2024.

Kortney started taking dual-credit courses while a junior at MLC. With some adjustments in the workload, each course counted toward both her undergrad and her graduate degree. “MLC made it easy to start early,” she says, “and to save a lot of money.”

**Her First Assignment:** Kortney graduated in December 2022. In May 2023, she was assigned to teach special education at Winnebago Lutheran Academy in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The program there, she explains, has two licensed teachers and two paraprofessionals serving about 30 students. She teaches two different levels of math, English, science, and study skills. She also meets with parents, collects assessment data, and completes progress reports.



At WLA, she had her bachelor’s degree, but she still had another year of work to finish her master’s. The first year of teaching is always challenging, and, admittedly, adding master’s courses made it even more demanding. But it was manageable—and worth the effort. “It was a lot to keep up with as I was also adapting to life as a first-time teacher and coach,” she says. “I was definitely busy, but it was doable.”

She especially enjoyed the course called Learning Disabilities and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders. “I was able to take what I was learning and immediately apply it to my teaching,” she says. “I was able to grow in my teaching practices in real time.”

**Her Encouragement:** Because of her own love for special education, Kortney urges teachers at all different levels to consider MLC’s master’s program. “It would be really beneficial for someone with a range of special education experience,” she says. “The courses allow for teachers to practice many different aspects of special education before they are actually thrown into the role. The internship part of the program gives teachers who may not have a solid experience with special education a chance to get a look at what a special education program might entail.”

And she has special words of advice for undergrads: “I would encourage special education majors to pursue this program while still taking undergraduate courses, because it will never be cheaper or easier than right now.”

Now is an excellent time to pursue a special education master’s degree for yet another reason: Many WELS schools are adding extended learning and special education programs of all kinds. Having a licensed teacher who also has a master’s degree gives a great boost to a school’s program, resulting in accelerated success for the students, greater buy-in by the parents, and increased credibility for the school.



**Heather Danell**  
MLC 2015  
New Ulm MN



**Noah Hartmann**  
MLC 2020  
Germantown WI



**Abigail Fischer**  
MLC 2015  
Watertown WI



**Mark Liesener**  
NWC 1960  
Milwaukee



**Her Love for This Ministry:** With a program like the one at WLA—and the new ones being developed at many WELS schools—Kortney knows that families like the one she remembers from her church would be able to send all their children to a school where the Word of God is taught daily, where the gospel infuses every minute of the day.

That gospel ministry is important to her.

And with the gospel as a foundation, she and her students can forge deep and meaningful connections.

“I love the connections that I can make with students,” Kortney says. “I often see students more often throughout the day than a general education teacher would, and this allows me to get to know them on a deeper level and to form more solid relationships with them.”

“I love that I have the opportunity to teach classes that are smaller in number,” she adds, “and students are able to really be comfortable in a classroom setting where their needs are being met.”

All of this, she says—sharing the gospel, giving students the resources and support they need to be successful, and connecting with them and their families in special ways—all of this makes teaching special education “the most rewarding job.”

## MLC’s Accelerated 4+1 Special Education Master’s Program

MLC offers undergraduate students an accelerated master’s program in special education with learning disability (LD) licensure. Qualified students can take dual-level courses that completely or partially fulfill both undergrad and graduate requirements. When they graduate with their bachelor’s degree in special education, they will be almost halfway through their master’s program. With one more year of coursework, they will graduate with their MS-Special Education with LD (Learning Disability) Licensure.

This accelerated program saves qualified students two years and \$4,000 on their master’s degree.

### Accelerated Master’s Degree Special Education with LD Licensure 36 credits

- ◆ Complete **3 courses (9 cr)**  
as an undergrad student
- ◆ Complete **3 courses (9 cr)**  
partially as an undergrad student  
partially as a graduate student
- ◆ Complete **6 courses (18 cr)**  
as a graduate student

## Take the Lead in Educational Technology

Are you passionate about technology? An early adopter? Intrigued by AI? Excited to learn more?

Wherever you are in your ministry—a current tech director, an aspiring one, or simply a teacher who wants to make a ministry impact through technology—MLC has a degree for you.

**In our MS in Educational Administration-Technology Director program,** you will learn how to . . .

- Utilize new tech tools to spark student learning
- Assist fellow faculty with tech
- Design infrastructure, implement hardware, and troubleshoot applications
- Create a technology plan and budget
- Make transformational changes across your school



*Learn  
more.*



**Stephanie  
Diersen**  
MLC 2000  
Caledonia  
MN



**Benjamin  
Kohls**  
MLC 2005  
Wausau WI



**DeLyte  
Dixon**  
DMLC 1965  
Rogers MN



**Matthew  
Heyn**  
DMLC 1995  
New Ulm MN

# Focus On *Scholarships*

## THE DR. ALLEN & JOANN WITTCHOW STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP



This scholarship fund was established in 2005. Dr. Allen Wittchow (1926-2016, pictured) attended St. Mark Lutheran School in Watertown, Wisconsin. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin (Madison) School of Medicine and Public Health and completed an ophthalmology residency at the Mayo Clinic. Dr. Wittchow and his wife,

JoAnn, served the Wisconsin Rapids community, where he owned and operated a medical practice for 33 years.

Dr. Wittchow's elementary years left a lasting mark on his life. That early Christian education was the impetus to establish this endowed scholarship for students with financial need. When he died in 2016, his obituary included this note: "Allen's Christian faith and Lutheran upbringing were important to him. Allen and his wife, JoAnn, established a scholarship fund at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota."

*Since the scholarship's inception 18 years ago, 36 students have received this grant, each expressing gratitude through a thank-you letter to the donor's family. Sophomore Mora Enoka's inspirational letter (right) demonstrates the impact of actions taken decades ago.*

February 29, 2024

Dear Mrs. Wittchow,

I want to express my deepest gratitude for your generous gift to support my education endeavors here at Martin Luther College. I truly wouldn't be able to achieve my goals without your help through the Dr. Allen and JoAnn Wittchow Student Scholarship.

I am the first in my family to be a natural-born citizen in this country. My parents immigrated to the United States in 2000 from South Sudan and settled in Salt Lake City, Utah. I was born and raised there, and absolutely love being able to call it my home.

I attended a community college for three years before coming to MLC, but I've always had a strong desire to teach in a Christian setting. I am now at MLC, majoring in secondary English education with minors in vocal music and urban ministry.

My parents were very adamant about Christian education, so they sent me to Prince of Peace Lutheran in Taylorsville, Utah. One of my grade school teachers, Mr. Jeffrey Sell, mentioned that he thought I would be fit for public ministry.

### Would you like to establish a named scholarship?

You can honor a loved one, support a specific area of ministry training, receive personal thank-you letters from MLC students, enjoy tax benefits, and—most important—give glory to the Lord of the Church while leaving a lasting legacy at MLC.

We'll help you set it up! Contact **Mark Maurice** (mauricme@mlc-wels.edu / 507.354.8221) or **Sarah Gieseke** (gieseksm@mlc-wels.edu / 507.354.8221).



**Thekla Hoenecke**  
DMLC 1960  
New Ulm MN



**Brayxton Alexander**  
MLC 2020  
Virginia Beach VA



**Marie Gehlhar**  
MLC 2010  
Hager City WI



**David Shilling**  
NWC 1995  
New Ulm MN

I didn't think much of it until my senior year of high school, but when I brought it up to my parents, there was immediate pushback.

They wanted me to be home to support them with my younger sister. As I attended community college and worked for the next three years, I felt unhappy. Although I enjoyed being around my family and friends, there was still a part of me that constantly wondered what it would be like to be at MLC.

In May of 2023, my pastor, Rev. Tyler Peil, and I came to visit, and I instantly fell in love with the school. I remember crying tears of joy because I felt like I needed to be here. I always wanted to be a teacher, but my love for Jesus was just too strong for me to teach in a public school. My parents still weren't happy with my decision, but I knew their reasoning was coming from a place of love.

Our God works everything out for our good though, because six months into the school year, their support is very much present.

I have had a passion for ministry since Mr. Sell mentioned it, and the desire to pursue it only grew stronger as I became older and realized how much the world around me needed

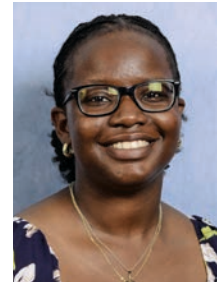
Jesus. There's a saying that I love, and it is my motto and motivation: "Make heaven crowded." I know it isn't my doing but the Holy Spirit who brings people to Christ; however, I just want people to know that Jesus loves them more than they could ever fathom.

At MLC, I am a photographer on campus, I sing in one of the choir ensembles, and I help with youth ministry at NorthCross Lutheran Church in Lakeville, Minnesota. I have really enjoyed and am encouraged by being surrounded by like-minded Christians who have the same goal as I do.

I cannot express how deeply appreciative I am to you for all the support you have given to me, other students, and this school. We honestly wouldn't be able to do it without people like you who pray for us and support us in all the ways you do. May God continue to bless you as you have blessed others, and let's make heaven crowded!

With the deepest gratitude,

Mora Enoka (Prince of Peace-Salt Lake City)



## 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 Allison Bovee at [boveeae@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:boveeae@mlc-wels.edu) to request a visit from us!

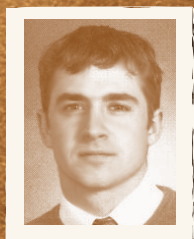
We're also grateful to the congregations that have recently hosted MLC Sundays: Riverview-Appleton WI, Trinity-Belle Plaine MN,

Bethel-Sioux Falls SD, Christ-North St. Paul/Hugo MN, St. John-Neillsville WI, Faith-Rising City NE, Faith-Anchorage AK, St. John-Manitowoc WI, Good Shepherd-Pipestone MN, St. John-Lake Benton MN, Fairview-Milwaukee, Trinity-Bay City MI, Abiding Word-Highlands Ranch CO, St. John-Caledonia MN, and First-La Crosse WI.

*Pictured: Professor Joel Thomford NWC '84, WLS '88 with Pastor Andrew Stuebs MLC '12, WLS '16 for an MLC Sunday at Living Word-Gray TN.*



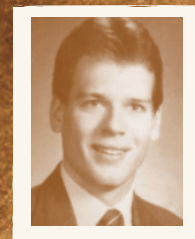
Karie Watchke  
DMLC 1985  
Blaine MN



Seth Kock  
MLC 2005  
Saginaw MI



Heather Hutchinson  
MLC 2000  
Sterling Heights MI



Karl Schultz  
NWC 1990  
Wausau WI

# Focus On *Giving*

## The Business of Growing

### The Schmidt Family Supports Shovel-Ready Projects at MLC

By Sarah Gieseke DMLC '82

“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

This passage keeps Christians humble. Take farmers. They do the physical labor, but ultimately, they know the Lord creates the yield. Business people understand this too. Hard work can only lay the foundation.

**Faithful Stewards:** Dan and Lonnie Schmidt, like most business owners, have worked hard since they started their real estate development business in 1988. But they make it very clear that it is the Lord who has blessed their business and made it grow.

After three and a half decades of challenges, growth, and blessings, the couple is stepping into a different role and looking for new ways to steward what God has given them. To quote Lonnie, “We have been greatly blessed with success and therefore have the opportunity to make donations.” But they wondered where and how. Their Christian giving counselor, **Rev. Jerry Ewings** NWC '79, WLS '85, was a catalyst in helping the Schmidts find that Martin Luther College was the right fit.

**Why MLC:** MLC wasn't a natural choice. Unlike many donors, the Schmidts have no relatives in the ministry. Their children didn't train to be pastors or teachers. But Dan and Lonnie value the impact of Christian education. They are members at St. Paul-Lake Mills, Wisconsin. All five of their children attended Lutheran grade school and Lakeside LHS.



Dan and Lonnie Schmidt, with their growing family, hope to use the blessings God has given them to encourage future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.

Now it's generational, with two of their grandchildren at Lakeside and eight younger ones coming up. They recognize the need to encourage more pastors, teachers, and staff ministers and to have an up-to-date, attractive college campus where students can thrive.

**Shovel-Ready Projects:** Through their business, Dan and Lonnie have learned that project planning is where the real work happens. They were drawn to campus improvements for which MLC had already laid out designs, gathered costs, gotten approvals, and looked at contingencies. Those “shovel-ready” projects they chose put money to work before costs increased and their donation's value diminished. Thanks to that focus, future projects are moving forward *now*.



## Students Excited for Renovations in “Cen-Ten”

The residence hall affectionately known as Cen-Ten is seeing some changes!

Using the generous gifts to our pre-pandemic campaign, *Equipping Christian Witnesses*, we are renovating the Centennial Hall showers and restrooms on all four floors. Construction on the Summit Avenue wing began this summer, and even as you read this, the construction crew is working hard. (We are also meeting with architects to plan a parallel renovation on the showers and restrooms in Summit Hall.)

- As Phase 1 of the **Chapel of the Christ Rehearsal Hall** (pictured) was being finished, the Schmidts gave the gift that enabled MLC to move seamlessly forward with Phase 2: the wall construction, electrical wiring, and furnishings. The project will continue through the 2024-25 school year.



- MLC's new **Summit Training Hall** (pictured) is now outfitted with state-of-the-art weight room equipment for our athletes and PE students. This gift from the Schmidts will also aid in recruiting future Knights, as our facility now stands toe to toe with other collegiate training facilities.



- Another Schmidt gift is allowing us to install our **High Ropes Adventure Course**, outdoor equipment for an adventure education focus in our PE major. MLC students are studying how experiential learning can foster trust and team building as well as physical education. MLC can also host community, corporate, and school groups for professional growth and team building on both the Low and High Ropes Adventure Course.



- And finally, another Schmidt gift was designated to MLC's **scholarship fund**. Like all of us, Dan and Lonnie want our MLC graduates to begin their public ministry with as little debt as possible. Their gift provides an immediate boost to students with financial need.

**A Philosophy:** There are many reasons to support the mission of MLC. Lonnie sums up their simple but profound giving philosophy: "We hope our gifts help bring improvements to MLC that will benefit current and future students."

God urges all of his believers to take the opportunity to give in whatever ways he puts on their hearts.

Cen-Ten will see another renovation as well: a brand-new gathering space in the lower level (rendering pictured). Featuring a new "chef's kitchen" with professional equipment, a bocce ball court, high-end furnishings, and acoustic tile, this renovation is being constructed by our own talented maintenance staff.

We're always walking that fine line between keeping MLC *attractive* and keeping MLC *affordable*. Using our own staff whenever possible is one way we practice wise stewardship as we maintain a high-quality campus—one that honors God, respects our students' gifts, and reflects the integrity of our mission.



# The Old Main Entrance *Needs Our Help!*

Chances are, when you think of the buildings on the MLC campus, one of first images that comes to mind is Old Main. This iconic building has stood as a symbol of our mission and history for 140 years. It has welcomed generations of students, faculty, and visitors, serving as a backdrop to countless memories and milestones.

The condition of the entrance stairway does not match the grandeur of the building. The concrete is dissolving, and the sides are leaning, *making it unsafe*, especially in the winter. Simpler solutions have not worked, and now we need to replace them.

The reconstruction opens the opportunity to repair the whole foundation along the entire entrance side of the building.

The new design (*pictured right*) includes an aesthetically pleasing covered entrance that honors the heritage of the old building. Covering the stairway will provide more safety and prevent further winter damage.



The architect's rendering for the proposed Old Main project includes repairing the foundation, replacing the stairway, and constructing an aesthetically pleasing covered entrance.



After many years of use, the Old Main stairway is crumbling. To address both safety and aesthetic concerns, it needs to be replaced.

Restoring the entrance is no small task! The estimated cost for this critical project is **\$650,000**. This will cover the

foundation repairs, replacement of the stairway, and the covered entrance.

**The Martin Luther College Alumni Association (MLCAA) is proud to assist all MLC friends and supporters with this project.**

MLC has budgeted \$100,000 for the project, leaving our fundraising goal at \$550,000. It's a large figure, but thanks to the generosity of Dan and Lonnie Schmidt (*St. Paul-Lake Mills WI*), any gifts to this project will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$275,000!

“Old Main greeted me each time I departed DMLC to walk down the hill into town and welcomed me back upon returning. The view from its steps was always breathtaking and helped me focus on the miraculous wonders of God's created world.”

– Sheila (Hughes) DeWuske *DMLC '83*

## Giving Is Easy!

Scan the QR code to donate online.

Text OLDMAIN to 507.233.4344.

Call 507.354.8221 x295.

Pay by check or credit card using the remit envelope in this magazine.

Contact VP for Mission Advancement Mark Maurice at [mauricme@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:mauricme@mlc-wels.edu) / 507.354.8221 or Director of Alumni Relations Michelle Markgraf at [markgrml@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:markgrml@mlc-wels.edu) / 507.233.9135



**Jade**  
St. Germaine  
MLC 2020  
Watertown WI



**Brian**  
Hennig  
NWC 1990  
Monroe MI



**Laura**  
Frick  
MLC 2000  
Sun Prairie WI



**Michael**  
Haase  
DMLC 1975  
Norfolk NE

# Focus On Alumni

By Director of Alumni Relations **Michelle Markgraf DMLC '90**



## Do You Remember?

Chapel services are an important aspect of life on the MLC campus, though the location has changed over the years. Who remembers this chapel? Where was it? Please send your answers to Michelle Markgraf at [alumni@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:alumni@mlc-wels.edu). Thank you!



### From Summer 2024 issue:

This early 1900s dirt path starts at the corner of Center Street and Summit Avenue and winds up the hill to Old Main. Between 1928 and 1931, the Excelsior Stairway was built to ease the walk up the hill.

What did we learn from our alumni? **John Hartwig** MLA '75, DMLC '82 told us that both streets were gravel roads until the early 1960s. **Marilyn Linn** DMLHS '56, **John Sperling** MLA '51, and **Rhoda Baer** DMLC wrote us with memories of walking the path many times while on campus. **Patrick Walker** DMLC '72 recalled sliding on the icy path walking from Summit Hall down to New Ulm.



## So Good to See You Again!

1958—that was the first year these alumni spent on the New Ulm campus. In June, they gathered in Wisconsin to share their memories—and then shared this wonderful photo with us!

## Reunions

Congrats to the classes who reunited in recent months:

- September 4-5: DMLC Class of 1966
- September 20-21: DMLHS Class of 1964
- September 20-21: MLA Class of 1974
- September 24-25: DMLHS Class of 1959
- September 27-29: DMLC Class of 1974

### *Now is the time to start planning your 2025 reunion!*

Reunions are a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with old friends and reminisce about your time in high school or college.

MLC can assist you with reunion planning. From choosing a date to securing college venues, the Office of Alumni Relations can provide the information and support you need to make your reunion a success.

Please don't hesitate to reach out. Let's make your 2025 reunion an event to remember! Contact Michelle Markgraf at [markgrml@mlc-wels.edu](mailto:markgrml@mlc-wels.edu) or 507.233.9135.



**Sarah Beilke**  
MLC 2005  
New Ulm MN



**Brian Dose**  
NWC 1980  
Wabasha MN



**Stacey Hummel**  
DMLC 1995  
Saginaw MI



**Gerald Lanphear**  
DMLC 1960  
Onalaska WI

# FACULTY & STAFF NOTES

**Professor Peter Baganz** DMLC '87 (history/social science) presented "Finding History in Popular Music" at the Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference in October.

**Dr. Bethel Balge** (adjunct, piano) serves as artistic director for ProMusica Minnesota Chamber Music Series. As a pianist, she is featured in the group's classical performances with musicians from the Minnesota Orchestra. Live recordings have been featured on American Public Media's *Performance Today* program.



**Professor Jacob Behnken** MLC '08, WLS '12 (dean of chapel) presented "Why Lutherans Have Hymnals" at the WELS Dakota-Montana District Convention in June and "Rediscovered Worship Principles and Practices that Call for Thanksgiving" at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Symposium in September.

**Dr. Michael Berg** MLC '00, WLS '05 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) presented on apologetics at the Southwestern Pastors' Conference at St. Paul-Mauston WI in April and at the WELS International Youth Rally at Fort Collins CO in June. He presented a Bible class series on vocation at St. John-Milwaukee and Garden Homes-Milwaukee in April. He preached and presented "Baptismal Life" at the WELS Women's Ministry Conference in Pewaukee WI in July. And he presented two sectionals, "Liturgical Myths and Truths" and "Signals Not to Send," at the WELS National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts at Carthage College-Kenosha WI July 30-August 2.

**Dr. John Boeder** NWC '86, WLS '90 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) presented "God Is on the Move: Your Big Truth for Big Moves" to the preseminary students at MLC in April.

**Dr. James Carlovsky** MLC '02, '10 (education, math, Graduate Studies) presented "Don't I Just Need to Know the Answer?" and "Cultivating Curiosity, Resilience, and a Growth Mindset" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference in October.

**Dr. Kenneth Cherney** NWC '84, WLS '88 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) presented "To Pull Up and to Plant: Jeremiah Preaches to a Nation in Crisis" at the Minnesota District Spring Pastors' Conference in St. Louis in April. He also serves on a working group for the National Association of Professors of Hebrew (NAPH) tasked with exploring uniform standards for teaching biblical Hebrew and designing an instrument to assess them. They presented "Imagine Universal Assessment of Proficiency in Biblical Hebrew" at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) November 23-26, 2024, in San Diego.

**Dr. Benjamin Clemons** MLC '03 (academic dean, Education and Staff Ministry; Graduate Studies) presented "Law & Gospel—As Applied

in a Context of Responsive Discipline" and "The ABCs of Classroom Management" to the Southern California Teachers' Conference at Carlsbad Christian Academy in March. He presented "Law & Gospel—Responsive Discipline and Building Christian Community" to the Twin Cities Metro Conference, and he led a two-day workshop on the Nine Essential Skills of Love & Logic at St. Peter LS-St. Peter MN. Finally, he presented "The ABCs of Classroom Management" and "I Believe—Reflective Teaching" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference in October.

**Professor Rebecca Cox** DMLC '89 (physical education) presented "The Senior Woman Administrator Designation" to the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference Administrative Council meeting at the University of Northwestern-St. Paul in August.

**Professor James Danell** NWC '86, WLS '90 (academic dean, Preseminary Studies) serves as the WELS World Mission Europe Team's representative to our sister church in Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFK). In June he attended the general pastors' conference and synod convention of the ELFK and preached for the closing service. In October he attended the annual meeting of the Europe Team in London as well as the WELS/ELS Forum in Mankato MN.

**Dr. Susan Decker** MLC '13 (English) presented "Arts Integration in English Language Arts," a sectional at the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English in Duluth in May, and "Demystifying the Mystery of 'Good Writing': Meaningful Writing Conferences that Save Time, Reduce Stress, and Get Real Results!," a sectional at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference in October.

**Professor Joel Fredrich** NWC '77, WLS '82 (Greek, theology) continued a study of the gospel of John at the pastors' summer school in Omaha NE in July.

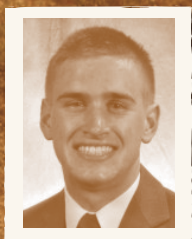
**Dr. Philip Huebner** MLC '03, WLS '07 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) preached for the 175th anniversary of historic Grace-Milwaukee in May. He presented the keynote address, "You Are Not Alone," at the WELS International Youth Rally in Fort Collins CO in June. And he led a mission team to the Philippines in July.



**Professor Paul Koelpin** NWC '85, WLS '90 (history) preached for the 125th church anniversary of Zion-Brighton Township MN in June and the area Reformation service in Houston in October. He presented "The Prophecy of Isaiah: A Mini-Bible" at the three-day Bible Blitz in Minocqua WI in July, and he presented the keynote "An 'A' for Attitude" at the St. Croix Pastors' Conference in September.



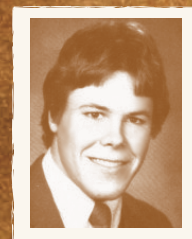
**Sally  
Ihlenfeldt**  
DMLC 1980  
Saginaw MI



**Isaiah  
Horn**  
MLC 2015  
Mazepa MN



**Nancy  
Hiles**  
DMLC 1980  
Estes Park CO



**Philip  
Malchow**  
NWC 1985  
New Berlin  
WI



**Linda Kramer** (director, Library Services) was invited to participate in an online panel discussion entitled “Help Your Patrons Discover More with Aspen” as part of the 2024 Evergreen International Online Conference in April.

**Dr. Jennifer Krause** MLC '96 (education) presented a 5-hour keynote, “Evidence-Based Reading in Primary Grades,” at the Dakota-Montana/Nebraska District Teachers' Conference in October.

**Dr. Martin LaGrow** DMLC '93 (Nontraditional Education Program, Graduate Studies) presented four topics at the California Online Teaching Conference in Long Beach CA in June: “Synchronous Learning and Assessment: Shifting Techniques to Meet Shifting Modalities,” “POCR that Works: Optimizing Peer Online Course Review for Results,” “Raising the Bar: An Academic Framework to Drive Increased Student Engagement,” and “Copyright and OER: What Can I Legally Use for Free?”.



**Dr. Nichole LaGrow** (director, Nontraditional Education Program) presented “When Equity Is Fundamental: Building a Program with Equity at Its Center” at the Peralta Online Equity Conference in April. In August, she and Dr. Marty LaGrow also traveled to Belize, where they were invited to train the faculty of Sadie Vernon Technical High School and members of the Ministry of Education in competency-based education.

**Dr. Robert Martens** MLC '09 (director, Information Technology; Graduate Studies) presented “Meeting Burnout by Leveraging Leadership” at the Minnesota Private College Council CIO/IT Directors Spring 2024 Gathering in March.

**Professor Jennifer Mehlberg** MLC '07 (early childhood education) presented a 5-hour keynote, “Play-Based Learning,” at the Dakota-Montana/Nebraska District Teachers' Conference in October.

**Dr. John Meyer** DMLC '87 (director, Graduate Studies and Continuing Ed) presented “Formative School Culture” and “Learning-Focused Instruction” at the Michigan District Teachers' Conference in October.

**Professor Emeritus Dr. Kermit Moldenhauer** DMLC '71 spent five months, August 2023 to January 2024, preparing worship materials for the new WELS mission startup in London. He wrote liturgical music, prepared a liturgical structure, recommended hymns, and helped plan worship for the first full year of the mission. His wife, **Laura** DMLC '71, was also busy, researching visa options, cell phone services, medical services, public transportation, and service opportunities for future volunteers to the mission.



**Dr. Kari Muentz** MLC '99 (social sciences, Graduate Studies) published a chapter entitled “Embracing Universal Design for Learning: Planning for Inclusive Social Studies Classrooms” in the book *Creating an Inclusive Social Studies Classroom for Exceptional Learners* (Information Age Publishing, 2024).

**Professor Thomas Nass** NWC '77, WLS '82 (Hebrew) saw publication of “CLC [Church of the Lutheran Confession] Discussions from 2015 to 2019” in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Spring 2024). He taught a Bible study series on Deuteronomy at St. Paul-New Ulm MN in April and May. And he presented “Lessons from Joel” at the St. Croix Men's Retreat in September.

**Dr. Lawrence Olson** NWC '79, WLS '83 (director, Staff Ministry Program; Graduate Studies) serves on the WELS World Mission Asia Team, which took him to Thailand for an annual planning meeting in January. He and other Asia Team members are also working closely with our sister church body in another Asian country where, because of government restrictions, we must develop a new way to provide theological education to church leaders.



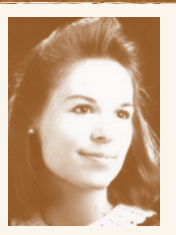
**Dr. Mark Paustian** NWC '84, WLS '88 (English, Hebrew) has made several presentations:

- “Here I Stand: Lutherans Finding Their Voice in Christian Apologetics” and “What Story Can I Tell? The Art of Narrative Witnessing” at the European meeting of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in Latvia in May
- “Adult Education as Communication,” a course at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Summer Quarter in June
- “Biblical Encouragement: The Power of Words,” a Bible study, at Crown of Life-Hubertus WI in June and at the Staff Ministry Conference at MLC in September
- “Lessons at the Burning Bush: A Hebrew Grammar Review,” a course at the Pastors' Institute in Breckenridge CO in July
- “Christian Apologetics: Another Form of Bringing Good News” at the WELS Women's Ministry Conference in Pewaukee WI in July
- “How to Talk about Jesus” at the Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference in October
- “Building a Culture of Grace” at the Men of His Word Conference in Rochester MN in October

**Professor Matt Pearson** MLC '97 (education) presented “It's Time to Simplify Your Life” at the Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference in October. Over the summer he led a golf clinic, “10 Core Drills for Your High School Golfers,” for coaches from 16 WELS high schools. The clinic, along with a round of golf for the 60 golfers, was held at Thornberry Golf Club outside Green Bay WI.

**Professor Greg Holzheuter** MLC '10 led a roundtable discussion on high school basketball for the basketball coaches in attendance.

**Dr. Joel Pless** WLS '86 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) presented “Memories of the 1974 St. Louis Walkout [Seminelx]” in August to the WELS Historical Institute at Salem Landmark Church-Milwaukee. He also published a book review of J. W. F. Hoefling's *How the Lutheran Church Is Constituted* in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Summer 2024).



**Maralisa Hidde**  
DMLC 1990  
Oconomowoc WI



**Robert Klindworth**  
DMLC 1970  
Lake City MN



**Connie Apitz**  
DMLC 1975  
New Ulm MN



**Neil Birkholz**  
MLC 2010  
Thornton CO

# FACULTY & STAFF NOTES



**Dr. Jonathan Roux** DMLC '94 (education, Graduate Studies) served as co-organist with **Michaela (Johnson) Zabell** MLC '22 at the 2024 Hymn Festival at St. John-Wood Lake MN in April. He led a two-session book study on Ruth Culham's *Teach Writing Well* for the Fox Valley Lutheran Federation in April. He served as the guest organist for the 140th anniversary of St. Peter-Balaton MN in September. He presented a 5-hour keynote, "Evidence-Based Reading in Middle to Upper Grades," at the Dakota-Montana/Nebraska District Teachers' Conference in October. And he presented the sectional "Picture Books and Chapter Books: What's New?" at the Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers' Conference in October.

**Rev. Nate Savage** MLC '18, WLS '22 (theology) led worship several times at Zion-Morton MN, Zion-Olivia MN, and Mt. Olive-Delano MN during their pastor vacancies.



**Professor David Scharf** MLC '00, WLS '05 (theology) has made several presentations:

- "Witnessing to the World" at the Pacific Northwest Men's Retreat in April
- "Blessings of Being a Called Worker" at the Staff Ministry Conference at MLC in September

- "Hermeneutics," a Bible class series, at St. Paul-New Ulm MN in September and October
- "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel," a Bible class series, at St. Paul-New Ulm MN in November and December

He also emceed the Luther Preparatory School Gala in April and preached for MLC Sundays at Riverview-Appleton WI, Faith-Anchorage AK, St. John-Lake Benton MN, Fairview-Milwaukee, Trinity-Bay City MI, and First-La Crosse WI. Finally, he also continues to serve as the "Q & A" monthly columnist for *Forward in Christ* magazine, and he contributes Grace Moments (written devotions) and Grace Talks (video devotions) for Time of Grace Ministries-Milwaukee.

**Professor Ross Stelljes** NWC '85, WLS '89 (theology) preached for a mission festival and presented "Evangelism in Times of Crisis" at Zion-Morgan MN in September. He also presented a keynote, "Joy in Ministry," at the Dakota-Montana/Nebraska District Teachers' Conference in October.

**Professor Emeritus Steven Thiesfeldt** DMLC '74 observed his 50th anniversary in the teaching ministry with a special worship service at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in April. After retiring from MLC in 2022, Steve accepted a part-time call to provide administrative support at MLS, leading the development of a strategic plan and fostering

faculty professional development over the past two years. In that role he presented "The Foolishness of God: A Biblical Perspective on Science," a six-hour workshop based on 1 Corinthians 1:25, to the MLS faculty.

**Professor Luke Thompson** MLC '09, WLS '13 (theology) presented "Direction, Not Perfection: A Lutheran Approach to Spiritual Care" as the keynote address at the Arizona-California District Convention in June and, in an abbreviated form, at the Beacon Campus Ministry in Mankato MN in April. He presented on the apologetics of Paul at the ELS Apologetics and Worldview Conference at Bethany Lutheran College-Mankato MN in June. And he and his wife, Christine Thompson, presented "Thinking Differently: An Approach to Young Adult Ministry" at the WELS International Youth Rally in Fort Collins CO in June.

**Professor Alan Uher** DMLC '87 (education) presented "Engaging the Disengaged" at Kenosha Lutheran Academy-Kenosha WI in June, "There's a Bible Story for That: Intentionalize God's Word in Every Subject" at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in August, and a 5-hour keynote, "Christ in My Classroom: Cultivating a Christian Classroom Culture," at the Dakota-Montana/Nebraska District Teachers' Conference in October.

**Professor Duane Vance** MLC '16 (education) led a WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA) team in an evaluation visit to Luther Preparatory School in April.

**Professor Emeritus Dr. David Wendler** DMLC '70 conducted a workshop titled "The Assessment of Student Learning" with the Hazelden Betty Ford Graduate School faculty in April.

**Dr. Keith Wessel** NWC '87, WLS '91 (Latin, theology, Graduate Studies) presented "Widows, Charity, and Poverty in the New Testament" at the Colonial North Pastors' Conference at Cross of Life-Mississauga, Ontario, in April. He also presented the keynote address on vocation at the Minnesota District Convention at Martin Luther College in June.

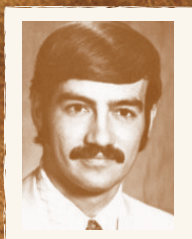
**Dr. Cindy Whaley** DMLC '76 (education, Graduate Studies) presented "Why You? Why Me? Thank You, Jesus, for the Privilege and the Pleasure" at the Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers' Conference in October.

**Dr. Jeffery Wiechman** DMLC '92 (VP for Academics, Graduate Studies) presented "Building Championship Culture" to the faculty of St. Peter-Sturgeon Bay WI in October.

**Professor Miles Wurster** (music) earned his Doctor of Arts (DA) from Ball State University this spring. His emphases were wind band conducting and music education.



**Rene Finke**  
MLC 2005  
Milltown NJ



**Robert Edwards**  
NWC 1975  
St. Paul MN



**Lisa Schneider**  
DMLC 1995  
Savanna IL



**Scott Schmudlach**  
DMLC 1985  
Beaver Dam WI

## On the Pods

**Dr. Michael Berg** MLC '00, WLS '05 (adjunct, Graduate Studies) cohosts *Let the Bird Fly!*

**Dr. Mark Paustian** NWC '84, WLS '88 (English, Hebrew, Graduate Studies) cohosts *Where Two or Three*, which recently featured two MLC professors as guests: **Professor Jacob Behnken** ("Communication in Worship") and **Professor Luke Thompson** ("Loneliness").

**Professor Paul Koelpin** NWC '85, WLS '90 (history) guested on *Impact*, where he spoke about lessons from Matthew's gospel.

## At the Worship Conference

MLC faculty members played leadership roles at the 2024 National Conference on Worship, Music, and the Arts, held July 30-August 2 at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

**Professor Jacob Behnken** MLC '08, WLS '12 led the sectional, "Eight Enduring Lessons from the *Achtliederbuch* [the first Lutheran hymnal]."

**Professor Adrian Smith** MLC '03 directed the 120-voice High School Honor Choir with full orchestra.

**Dr. Mark Paustian** NWC '84, WLS '88 (English, Hebrew, Graduate Studies) held a book signing of his book *Our Worth to Him* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2021).

## New Faculty



**Dr. Susan Decker**  
Professor of English

Susan is a graduate of Memorial High School-Eau Claire WI and Martin Luther College (2013). Her first call was to West LHS, where she served as English department chair and instructor, drama director, yearbook advisor, Teens for Life advisor, book club advisor, and Mock Trial coach. She also

served on the school's administrative team, curriculum committee, and MNSAA accreditation team. In addition, she served Ascension-Plymouth MN as worship music coordinator, directing the various choirs and selecting/arranging both traditional and contemporary pieces for worship. Susan earned a master's degree in English from Southern New Hampshire University and a doctoral degree in English pedagogy with a teaching literature specialization from Murray State University, where her capstone work focused on fine arts and ELA integration.



**Jon Hermanson**  
Professor of Music

Jon is a graduate of St. Paul LS-New Ulm MN, Minnesota Valley LHS (2000), and Martin Luther College (2006). He served for five years as grade 5-6 teacher at Trinity LS-Kiel WI, four years as a music instructor at Illinois LHS, and the past nine years as an instructor at Minnesota Valley LHS in the departments of

music, religion, English, and physical education. Jon also served as the recruitment director for the past two years. Jon earned a master's degree in music education from VanderCook College of Music-Chicago. Jon and his wife, Katie (née Moll) MLC '06, have been married for 17 years and have three children: Jonah (15), Amelia (12), and Isaiah (9).



**MacKenzie Holzbauer**  
Admissions Counselor

MacKenzie is a graduate of Faith LS-Fond du Lac WI (2015), Winnebago Lutheran Academy (2019), and Martin Luther College (2024). MacKenzie met her husband, Samuel MLC '23, during their time together at MLC, and the two were married in July of 2023. Samuel works as a teacher at River Bend Education District in New Ulm.



**Janet Justice**  
Admissions Counselor

Janet is a graduate of Michigan Lutheran Seminary (2015) and Martin Luther College (2019). She was assigned to Christ-Eagle River WI as the primary grade teacher. During her four years there, Janet met and married her husband, Matthew, who serves full-time in the Army National Guard.



**JoElyn Krohn**  
Professor of Mathematics, Financial Wellness Coordinator

JoElyn attended Friedens LS-Kenosha WI, King of Grace LS-Golden Valley MN, and Bay Pines LS-Seminole FL. She is a graduate of St. Croix LHS (1999), Bethany Lutheran College (2001), and Concordia University-St. Paul MN (2003). After completing her degree

in elementary education and before her work in higher education, she tried various careers, including front desk at several hotels, flight attendant, and certified medical assistant. JoElyn has worked at Cornell University, St. Olaf College, and Minnesota State University-Mankato, where she received her master's degree in college student affairs. She became an accredited financial counselor in 2015. JoElyn and her husband, Seth, have been married 10 years and have two children, Hazel (7) and August (5).

# 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:



**Kassidy Aguilar** *MLC '25*  
(*Cross of Glory-Peoria AZ*)

### HER ELIJAH

**Leah Nass** *MLC '17*  
(*now serving Divine Savior Academy-Doral FL*)

Leah Nass, my World History teacher at California LHS, encouraged me to make the most of the gifts God has given me and to choose a college where I could be confident I was serving him. Leah always lent a helpful ear as I sat on the couch in her classroom each morning to tell her my stresses or happy news. She prayed for me often and cheered me on through every sports match, choir anthem, and drama production. During my senior year, she took a call to DSA Doral, so it became *our* senior year. We shared “lasts” and made the most of our “COVID classes.” Without Leah, I wouldn’t have had that last final push to go to MLC—a decision I thank God for every day. I’m glad to call Leah a close, trusted friend, and I am grateful to have had such a strong support system during big moments of my life.

**Luke Rogotzke** *MLC '25*  
(*Zion-Sanborn MN*)

### HIS ELIJAH

**Dave Gartner** *DMLC '92*  
(*now serving West LHS*)

Mr. Dave Gartner was my grade school principal at St. John in Redwood Falls, Minnesota, and he often encouraged me to consider becoming a pastor. I’d just be passing him in the halls, and he’d say, “There could be a future pastor!”

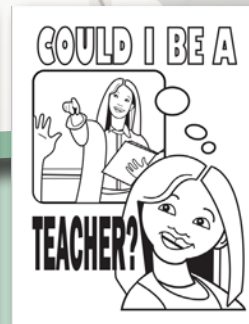
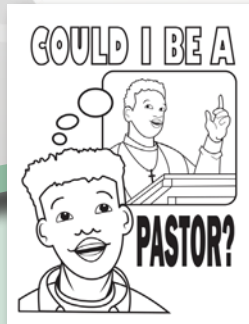


**Katie Kutz** *MLC '26*  
(*St. John-Dakota MN*)

### HER ELIJAH

**Mark Kutz** *DMLC '94*  
(*St. John-Dakota MN*)

Mr. Mark Kutz, principal at St. John’s in Dakota, Minnesota—and my dad—is so encouraging to all his students and does a fantastic job of preparing them for high school. He supports them in all their activities and prepares them to be great Christian young adults. The impact he’s had on his students encourages me daily and motivates me to be dedicated to my studies. He’s shown me how to be the most patient teacher—and the most loving parent!



Use our Project Elijah classroom resources to be an Elijah for your students! Our K-8 materials include two outstanding coloring books created by Peter Schaeve *DMLC '87*. [mlc-wels.edu/publications/project-elijah](http://mlc-wels.edu/publications/project-elijah)