

From Madison to the World

A Brief Overview of the History of WELS Campus Ministry

Church History 331
David Koehler
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The history of campus ministry in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has developed slowly over the past eighty years. By the grace of God, the ministry to students at secular campuses across North America has brought the gospel message to many unbelievers and nurtured the faith of many WELS young people. The following is brief sketch of the history of WELS campus ministry "from Madison to the World."

Madison Student Mission

The Wisconsin Synod began its Campus Ministry program in the 1920's in a joint effort with the Missouri Synod. Seeing the need to minister to the students at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, they established the Madison Student Mission (also called Calvary Student Mission.) For forty years the two synods worked together to bring the gospel to college students. However, it was not an equal partnership. The Missouri Synod owned fifty-nine percent of the mission and the Wisconsin Synod owned forty-one percent. Most of the clergy who served at the Madison Student Mission were Missouri pastors, with a few Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary vicars serving there also.

As the 1950's were coming to a close, tensions between the two church bodies were at their highest. Realizing that the students were outgrowing the Madison Student Mission and fellowship between the two church bodies was coming into question, it was proposed already in 1957 that Wisconsin Synod begin its own student mission in Madison. The resolution was passed and \$200,000 was designated for the project. However, it was determined that starting a

new student mission was not feasible. Thus, the District Mission Board of Western Wisconsin recommended that Wisconsin and Missouri continue to carry out its ministry together.¹

In 1959, the Madison Student Mission had its first Wisconsin Synod pastor. Pastor Walter Wegner received and accepted the call to Madison. He became the Synod's first full-time campus pastor.²

The Mission continued to struggle with the decision to separate from Missouri or help expand the existing facilities. The General Synod approved the spending of \$137,600.39 for the new addition to the Madison Student Mission. The Board of Directors moved forward in spending the money on a property. The Synodical Council encourage the Wisconsin Synod Board of Trustees to release the money for the expansion. However, the Board of Trustees declined to release the money on the grounds that this was "exorbitant, not authorized." The Western Wisconsin District concurred with the Synodical Council and the Madison Student Mission Board and encouraged the Board of Trustees to release the funds.³ It seems as though both the sides were at an impasse.

The WELS Starts On Their Own

In 1961, the Madison Student Mission was still attempting to expand its facilities and ministry. In their Synod Convention Report, the ministry was outlined, emphasizing the limited space available. The emphasis of the Mission was primarily "the preaching of the Word." An average of 615 students were attending worship on Sunday mornings and 200 at midweek

¹ Report to the Nine Districts - 1958, p.21.

² Western Wisconsin District Report - 1960, p.14.

³ Western Wisconsin District Report - 1960, p.51.

services. Forty-four people received confirmation instruction and many hours were spent in counseling. With the population of the University expected to increase dramatically, the Student Mission Board in Madison envisioned the old facilities renovated and a new chapel built.⁴

The plans were being made with a huge shadow looming over the mission. The year of 1961 marked the Wisconsin Synod's suspension of fellowship with Missouri Synod. Where would this leave the Student Mission at Madison? No immediate action to dissolve the joint ministry was taken.

The leaders of the Student Mission were poised to establish an independent WELS Campus Ministry. They placed before the Synod Convention an extensive proposal dealing with the purpose and goals of student ministry as follows:

Factors To Be Considered

- I. The need that young people, especially away from home, have for spiritual strengthening, Christian fellowship, and church-centered activity.
 - A. The constant pull is away from Christ and His Church.
 - B. The insidious attacks on faith in the classroom at times and in many social situations.
- II. The lack of real concern, even of indifference, by the home congregation to the spiritual needs of young people especially when they leave the environs of the home congregation.
- III. The lack of real concern, even of indifference, by sister congregations to the spiritual needs of young people especially who are temporarily or semipermanently in an area served by them.
 - A. Students at colleges and universities.
 - B. Students at trade or technical schools of all kinds.
 - C. Young women in nurses' training.
 - D. Young people temporarily away from home because of employment training or similar reasons.
- IV. The halfhearted attempts to meet this need even though it deserves our wholehearted concern and is a Christian obligation.
 - A. Personal contact and personal service are necessary.

⁴WELS Synod Convention Report - 1961, p.34-35.

- B. We are losing to other church bodies, because they serve them in their college years, many professionally trained people, who could be providing leadership and support for the work of our church on the local, District, and synodical level.

A Suggested Program

- I. Arouse our pastors and congregations to their responsibility over against the souls of the young people entrusted to their care.
 - A. By letter.
 - B. Through regular articles in the church periodicals.
 - C. By appointing a contact man for this work in each conference.
 - D. By an all-out program to secure the names and addresses of young people temporarily or semipermanently away from home.
- II. Methods which may be used in discharging this responsibility.
 - A. Route the names and addresses from the LSWC office through the contact men of the conference for assignment to pastors and congregations.
 - B. Emphasize the necessity for personal contact with the young people.
 - 1. By the local pastor, and/or
 - 2. By the committees of congregations asked to serve in this program.
 - C. Set up a transportation system within affected congregations, when practical, to get the "away-from-home" young people to and from services and other church functions.
 - 1. By enlisting the aid of members who live near such young people.
 - 2. By establishing a hospitality roster of families who are willing from time to time to "sponsor" several young people by bringing them to church and by taking them home to dinner.
 - D. Where there is more than one congregation in an area where such service is needed, ask the congregations through the conference contact man to establish intercongregation committees to facilitate the work.
 - E. Encourage interested and responsible laymen to underwrite the acquisition of student centers on college and university campuses.
 - F. Interest the Ladies' Aids in the various affected congregations to make this program their responsibility.
 - 1. It would be a real Christian service.
 - 2. They would be most likely to have a heart for this program.
 - G. Take the steps necessary to empower the LSWC, perhaps through the District Mission Boards, to subsidize to a limited extent this program in congregations where the demands may be heavy and where the need for some subsidy may be indicated, and to reimburse the contact men for out-of-pocket expenses.
 - H. Make repeated appeals to our constituency for suggestions on how to operate this program successfully and efficiently.⁵

⁵ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1961, p.33-34.

The plan seems to have been to move away from the Missouri Synod help in the Student Mission field and begin an independent Campus ministry as soon as possible. However, two years later, even though the³ Synods had formally split, the Student Mission in Madison continued as a joint effort. In 1963, the Board for Home Missions was still wrestling with the problem of dissolution. They recognized the need to separate, but at the same time, realized the responsibility they had toward the students at Madison.⁶ The Board officially encouraged the Western Wisconsin District Mission Board and Madison Student Mission to "orderly separate" from the joint mission work. They gave the go ahead for the WELS to start its own Madison Student Mission and resolved to appropriate the money for it.⁷

The need for this ministry was strongly emphasized again in the Synod Convention report. It seems as though that those involved were still upset by the lack of support and general apathy toward this ministry in the Wisconsin Synod.

"Several areas with a heavy concentration of Wisconsin Synod students could have a full-time ministry if an adequate program of spiritual growth and guidance is to be carried on. This will require sizable outlays of funds. However, the Synod has not demonstrated that it wishes to subsidize a full-time ministry in the areas which warrant it. Hence the hands of the LSWC remain tied to a part-time ministry. The Commission is ready to move ahead as soon as funds become available."

"On the part of some pastors and lay people there is a great interest in the development of a campus ministry. On the other hand, some seemingly have little or no concern for our young people away from home as far as an organized spiritual ministry is concerned. Others are of the opinion that the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of these young people lies solely and alone with the congregation in which they hold communicant membership. The Synod, therefore, needs to become clear on the nature and the extent of any student service program it wishes to pursue."

"In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the primary concern and emphasis of the Commission is on the spiritual needs of the students. Any social activity is purely a by-product. Experience proves that the students themselves are mainly interested in Bible study and in answers to questions raised on the campus which militate against their faith."⁸

⁶ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1961, p.152.

⁷ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1961, p.162.

⁸ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1963, p.155.

The Board for Home Missions also made sure to emphasize the results and efforts made in Campus ministry thus far. Student names were being collected. Twenty-five pastors were serving students part-time. One pastor was serving full-time.⁹ Students in Mankato and Morris, Minnesota, were being served by campus ministry, with the plan to purchase a student house in Mankato. It was also planned to do ministry in Minneapolis.¹⁰ Colorado was also seeking to provide campus ministry in Boulder, Ft. Collins, and Greeley.¹¹

In 1964, it was reported in the Western Wisconsin District Report that after forty-four years, the joint work in Madison with the Missouri Synod had become history. The Wisconsin Synod sold their forty-one percent to Missouri and called the Rev. Richard Balge to serve as the student pastor in Madison. He was installed June 21, 1964 in the Women's Building at 240 W. Gilman. The first service he conducted was held the following Sunday.¹²

The Wisconsin Synod was well on its way to developing its own independent campus ministry. The Board for Home Missions announced the dissolution of the Madison joint ministry in the Synod Convention Report of 1965.

“It is with some misgivings that we worked toward the dissolution of the joint student effort during the past years, but it is only with joy and humble gratitude that we have been witnessing the blessings which God has poured out upon our efforts to establish our own student chapel and center, providing us with a pastor, a very adequate temporary place of worship in a fine new site, and the prospects of a beautiful new house of worship in the very near future. How gracious our God has been, to whom all the glory be given for all that is being done in His name on the University campus in Madison.”¹³

⁹ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1963, p.154.

¹⁰ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1963, p.148.

¹¹ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1963, p.147.

¹² Western Wisconsin District Report - 1964, p.26.

¹³ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1965, p.185.

Other campus ministries were also beginning to grow and flourish. The Southeastern Wisconsin District announced plans to acquire their campus house in 1965.¹⁴ This was the start of great strides being made in WELS campus ministry.

Lutheran Collegians

As the WELS was establishing its own campus ministry and student ministry opportunities were appearing across the nation, the Synod deemed it necessary to start a national organization of "Lutheran Collegians." It was necessary to do this because at some campuses work could be only carried out if affiliated with a national chapter. The organization was also intended to strengthen the individual campus ministries by sharing planning, experiences, solutions, and programs. The official name of the organization was "Lutheran Collegians - WELS." A model constitution, charter handbook, a symbol were developed. A campus pastor workshop was held in September of 1964. On April 24 -25, 1965, a conference of representatives was held in Whitewater, Wisconsin, to approve the national constitution and elect officers. Sixty collegians, five campus pastors, and two Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission representatives were present at this conference.¹⁵

With the new organization up and running, the Lutheran Collegians moved forward with the ministry on college campuses. In the Synod Convention Report of 1967, once again the emphasis was laid out of the importance of the ministry.

"The investment of our Synod in student work is an investment in the future. These young people are some of the future lay leaders of our Synod. Our Lord is blessing

¹⁴ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1965, p.185.

¹⁵ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1965, p.192.

them with an education that can serve a valuable purpose in the work of His church. The guidance which we are privileged to provide them can be invaluable.”¹⁶

A “Workbook for Campus Pastors” was developed by Pastor Balge in Madison and was being used by campus pastors throughout the Synod. The second Lutheran Collegian convention was held with over 200 in attendance, representing fifteen different campuses. Also each year a workshop for campus pastors was held with good attendance.¹⁷

In the Western Wisconsin District alone, there was campus ministry being done on about twelve campuses. A student center and chapel were established in La Crosse, Wisconsin, which was Synod funded. In Whitewater, Wisconsin, a student center was funded by a local congregation.¹⁸ Lutheran collegians were started at Michigan State, the University of Michigan, Ferris State College (Michigan) and Western Michigan University.¹⁹

All things were not running perfectly though in WELS campus ministry. There seemed to be much confusion as to who was responsible for this ministry.

“One chronic problem for the LSWC is the seeming overlapping of responsibility that at times exists with the District Mission Boards. Campus pastors operate under the jurisdiction of the Mission Board, and all reports are sent to them. The acquisition of property and other facilities is ordinarily handled through the Mission Board. As a result the LSWC is often out of touch with existing conditions. It is our hope that the committee appointed to make a study of the scope of responsibility of all departments of the Synod will offer a solution to this awkward problem.”²⁰

The problem of oversight seems to have lingered for a few more years after this convention.

¹⁶ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1967, p.211.

¹⁷ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1967, p.210-211.

¹⁸ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1967, p.198.

¹⁹ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1967, p.195.

²⁰ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1967, p.210.

The amount of information concerning the next few years is sparse in the Synod Convention Reports and District Reports. However the importance of doing work on our nation's campuses was reemphasized.

“In our opinion, this student chapel in Madison, serving well over a thousand Wisconsin Synod youth, is one of the most important arms of the church in our entire District. Our students need this center and chapel, studying as they are in an atmosphere which can so easily prove (prove) disastrous to their faith. Very heartening has been the growth of the congregation which is maintained with the student center, its membership having more than doubled in the past year. We want to mention also the high morale and zeal of the students, . . .”²¹

The Spiritual Welfare Commission stressed, in light of the threats to youth, the importance of sending in names of students for campus ministries. It was also resolved that each congregation should appoint a committee of laymen to send these names in.²²

As Lutheran Collegians broke into the 1970's, less and less was written about it in convention and district reports. However, that does not necessarily mean campus ministry was in decline. In 1971, it was reported that the WELS had 8,000 men and women attending state colleges and universities. District Mission Boards appointed 150 campus pastors and the number of Lutheran Collegian chapters continued to increase. Also 1971 marked the first sign of Lutheran Collegians doing mission work.²³ This will become a prominent aspect of WELS campus ministry in the years to come.

In 1975, it was resolved to develop a student newspaper to be distributed to WELS students at secular campuses. Five pastors were also preparing new materials designed to assist pastors who were serving campus ministries.²⁴ In 1977, the Synod formally thanked the

²¹ Western Wisconsin District Report - 1969, p.31-32.

²² WELS Synod Convention Report - 1969, p.124-125.

²³ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1971, p.89-90.

²⁴ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1975, p.74.

members of Lutheran Collegians who assisted with canvassing in the Synod's Travel-Canvass-Witness Program.²⁵ In 1979, it was reported that a student newspaper, Hand Out, and a newsletter for campus pastors, In Touch, were created for mailing to campus ministry programs. This report also encouraged that the efforts to serve the WELS college youth be intensified with full-time pastors wherever possible.²⁶

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Campus Ministry

In 1981, the Lutheran Collegians became the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Campus Ministry. It fell under the direction of the Campus Ministry Committee. It refocused its purpose towards mission outreach. The organization had a new name, a new administration, and a new purpose.²⁷

In spite of this, Campus Ministry seemed to be still struggling with Synod support. After requesting continued funding for its full-time ministries in Madison, Minneapolis, and the Fox River Valley of Wisconsin, the Board for Home Missions recommended to eliminate this funding. The Synod followed the Board's recommendation and the funding was eliminated for these three ministries.²⁸

The lack of support did not last long though. In 1983, the Synod authorized the calling of full-time pastors to Milwaukee and Minneapolis. The Synod even resolved to fund these positions as soon as it was feasible.²⁹ As of 1985, these positions were not funded by the Synod

²⁵ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1977, p.88.

²⁶ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1979, p.102-103.

²⁷ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1981, p.74.

²⁸ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1981, p.73.

²⁹ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1983, p.63.

yet. Once again the subsidy for these ministries was called for, with the addition of East Lansing, Michigan.³⁰

Once again to stress the importance of the Synod's work in campus ministry, the WELS Campus Ministry Committee set forth the purpose and needs of the programs.

“Campus ministries are needed to provide support and strengthening of student's faith in Christ during a critical crossroad of their lives, when their faith is attacked, their life-style is challenged and their direction uncertain; and an active campus ministry is a major source of Christian fellowship and counseling in good times and bad and of spiritual training and strengthening for future work in other congregations.”³¹

Once again there seems to have been a push to gain respect for these ministries. In the coming years, strides would be made to continue this effort.

In the next convention's report, the point was made that the WELS was losing many college students. It was resolved that the WELS “reaffirm its long-standing commitment to evangelize the college campuses of North America” and “that the various synodical boards whose work touches the secular campus continue and/or intensify their efforts in campus ministry.”³²

Home Missions stated that “its number one objective in campus ministry, ‘to reach out to the unchurched of the campus community with the gospel of Jesus Christ through the campus pastor and our trained WELS students.’” The Board also stated the worth of the programs as they have a higher rate of adult confirmands than the typical WELS congregation, they all serve as “worker training” programs for the Synod's future lay leaders, the ministries send out the students into lifetime service and financial support to the work of the WELS, and several campus ministry alumni have entered the public ministry. The results were the resolutions to allocate

³⁰ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1985, p.66.

³¹ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1985, p.69.

³² WELS Synod Convention Report - 1987, p.75.

funds from the Synod and the Districts to aggressively seek out and open new campus ministry programs.³³

The Board for World Missions emphasized the working with foreign students at our American universities. One reason for this was that these students would someday be leaders in the nations. Also this would give the WELS an opportunity to do world mission work on a very cost effective basis. The WELS would also have the opportunity to preach the gospel in countries closed to our missionaries. The Board resolved to develop strategies and programs to carry out this work with foreign students.³⁴

The Board for Worker Training realized that Campus Ministry was beneficial for its purpose also. They recognized that this ministry was a largely untapped field for future full-time workers in the Synod. They resolved to develop strategies and programs to recruit students to the Synod's worker training schools from the secular campuses.³⁵

And finally in 1987, it was resolved that Board for Home Missions ask the appropriate synodical agencies develop materials and training programs for campus ministries. The Synod realized that funding for a full-time Campus Ministry Secretary/Counselor was not feasible. The result was that Campus Ministry would retain its existing administration, which was the District Mission Boards and Campus Ministry Committee and Board for Home Missions.³⁶

³³ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1987, p.76.

³⁴ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1987, p.77.

³⁵ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1987, p.78.

³⁶ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1987, p.78-79.

Campus Ministry Moves Forward to the New Millennium

In the last decade of the of the 1900's, Synod Convention and District reports give little information. It is evident that the ministry is focused. It is also evident that there is growth and likewise more respect is given to this very important ministry to God's people. In 1991, the Synod made the Campus Ministry Committee a standing committee of the Board for Home Missions. The Campus Ministry Committee also produced a video, "On Your Own, But Not Alone." It was recommended for synod-wide use.³⁷

In 1993, the Campus Ministry Committee ^{reported} recorded its statistics to ^{the} Synod Convention. There were 700 pastors and congregations who served as contacts for WELS students on college campuses. There were 30 pastors who served part-time campus ministries. There were five pastors who served full-time campus ministries. Commendations were given to campus ministries who were active in international outreach on their campuses and to Campus Ministry for the 190 students who served forty-three congregations as part of its Travel/Canvass/Witness program.³⁸

In the last Synod Convention before the millennium, the Synod formally thanked the Board for Home Missions for its efforts in campus ministry. It encouraged the pastors and congregations to support this important ministry. It also encouraged the Board for Home Missions "to move the campus ministry Forward in Christ by expanding contact with international students and students outside the Midwest."³⁹

³⁷ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1991, p.83.

³⁸ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1993, p.80-81.

³⁹ WELS Synod Convention Report - 1999, p.31.

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Campus Ministry has not developed overnight. From its early beginnings with the Missouri Synod to its independent ministry on secular campuses it has nurtured the faith of the Synod's young people. From its start on the campus of the University of Wisconsin - Madison to its mission work with foreign students at campuses across North America, the faithful campus pastors and dedicated lay members have spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. By the grace God, the WELS has served our nation's campuses, bringing this saving message "from Madison to the world."

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