

WLCFS History: 1996-2006

Applying the healing and helping ministry of Jesus Christ to the people of a
sinful and troubled world

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WLCFS History: 1996-2006¹ (The Fourth Decade)

Jesus was speaking clearly and directly to his disciples once when he said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!” he said, “I have overcome the world.”

(John 16:33)

In this world, filled with sin, young and old will experience pain and sorrow. In this world, Christians without exception will struggle with physical, mental, emotional and relational difficulties. In this world, you will have trouble.

In Jesus you will find peace. In Jesus you will find more than physical healing. In Jesus you will find spiritual healing. You will find forgiveness of your sins. In Jesus you will find hope and comfort.

For more than four decades Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services (WLCFS) has been applying the healing and helping ministry of Jesus Christ to people young and old. It is still their mission after four decades to fulfill the plea of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 6:10. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

In the past 42 years WLCFS has witnessed many changes in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). There have been changes in its churches, its families, its counseling and educational emphasis. Yet one thing that has not changed is the need for Christians to apply God’s unchanging Word to their troubled lives. WLCFS continues “changing to meet the changing needs of the WELS with the unchanging

¹ A note to the reader: This paper is meant to follow up the Senior Church History of Paper of David Blaho. *WLCFS History: 1965-1995*.

Gospel of Jesus Christ.”² It is the mission of WLCFS “to apply the healing and helping ministry of Jesus Christ to the people of a sinful and troubled world.”³

From the time of its inception, WLCFS saw a need and they strove to meet that need. There was a need for convalescent care. There was also pressure to start a social services division. The convalescent home would serve the aging Lutherans in the Milwaukee area while the social services could aid Lutherans seeking adoptive services. Within two years of becoming a corporation unto itself, WLCFS was thriving under the leadership of Pastor E.F. Lehninger and others. For 25 years Pastor Lehninger would oversee this growing operation of love. Convalescent Care and Social services were the mainstays of the organization until the early 1990’s.

To truly understand the fourth decade and beyond of WLCFS, one must look at the happenings of 1991-1995. The early 1990’s brought many changes to the organization. Pastor Robert Michel accepted a call to replace Pastor Lehninger as Executive Director in 1991. Pastor Michel had been with WLCFS since 1975. With a change in leadership, a new structure and a new direction were set in place. WLCFS continued giving top-notch care for the elderly.

However, the social services division began to expand. 1991 brought a new educational emphasis to the Social Services division.

“By 1995 the Social Services division was involved in 139 educational speaking engagements, 225 alcohol awareness meetings, 715 family counseling sessions and 2,026 pastor/teacher consultations. The Wels CareLine, started in 1991, was now receiving more than 3,000 calls a year. On a sad note, WLCFS was only able to place 2 children for adoption.”⁴

² Blaho, *WLCFS History, 1965-1995. Senior Church History Paper*

³ *Healing and Helping, Fall 2007*

⁴ *WLCFS Annual Report, 1995*

Furthermore, there was a public relations push starting in 1994 and going into 1995. One aspect of their ministry that received special attention was counseling. WLCFS was exploring opportunities in the Arizona. They were opening new counseling offices in Wisconsin and Minnesota. An encouragement went out to all pastors and congregations via a 6-minute video entitled *The Christian Difference in Caring*.

“Please do not overlook this valuable tool in introducing the concept of the Christian counseling to your members. Many of them may be hesitant in seeking the kind of help they need in working through their personal and family issues and even hesitate to ask their pastor. We would hope this ice-breaker will lead to a team-approach in our partnership to serve God’s people.”⁵

WLCFS wanted to assure WELS member and themselves that the counseling they were offering was rooted in God’s Word. For this reason, a special committee was working on a course of scriptural study. Professor Alan Siggelkow of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary led this committee. The idea behind this was to give a theological certification for the therapists of WLCFS.

1995 also marked the first meeting between WLCFS and the WELS Committee on Relief. These two organizations met to explore ways of jointly responding to massive tragedy and accidents. For years the Committee on relief was able to help victims with physically. By working with WLCFS, they were able to add a new dimension of mental and psychological care.

Another exciting change was also in the works in 1995. Plans were beginning for an assisted living center complex for the elderly. There were plans to break ground in 1996 and open as early as 1997. This complex would be built next to its parallel corporation of Luther Haven.

⁵ *WLCFS Pastoral Conference Report*, Spring 1995

All of these exciting new changes, coupled with the unfortunate decline of the social services adoption program, meant new terminology for the organization. In a report to the district conventions in the summer of 1996 WLCFS states, “We are still WLCFS. However, we have adopted new titles to better describe the services offered in our four operating centers.”⁶ The new four centers or divisions are:

1. Wisconsin Lutheran Care Center- This is a 161 bed skilled nursing home. It has a special Alzheimer and Dementia unit, physical therapy and a full time chaplain. It is located at 6800 N. 76th Street.
2. Wisconsin Lutheran Christian Counseling- This division offers therapy for families and individuals. It also offers alcohol and other drug awareness classes. Despite not having a state-granted license as an adoption agency anymore, this division is still committed to helping unwed parents. They also offer educational and preventive programs. This division now has 10 offices in the Midwest.
3. Wisconsin Lutheran Living Center- Still in the works, this will be a 24 unit assisted living facility. This is located on 97th St. in Northwest Milwaukee next to Luther Haven. It is scheduled to open in May of 1997.
4. Wisconsin Lutheran Home Health Agency- This is an RN assessment and housekeeping agency that travels within Southeastern Wisconsin.

1996 not only set new terminology in place, but also saw contributions to the agency increase 23%. This was truly a blessing from the Lord as WLCFS still operated totally on donations. WLCFS would see a steady increase in contributions until the year 2001.

1997 saw the dedication of a new facility to God’s glory. Wisconsin Lutheran Living Center was officially dedicated on October 19th, 1997. The Living Center quickly filled to capacity. Therefore, “The Board of Directors requested staff to pursue feasibility

⁶ *WLCFS Report to District Conventions, Summer 1996*

studies for assisted living facilities in other geographical areas.”⁷ Unfortunately, this task would prove very difficult and it was set aside.

WLCFS made progress on the counseling front in 1997. New cases were up from the year before. It was obvious that families and individuals were becoming more and more open to the idea of Christian counseling.

*Guide me with Your Counsel*⁸ was adopted in 1997. This was a course of scriptural study with theory and methods for Christian counseling. This course was set for implementation in April of 1998. However, it was still only in outline form. It would not be until October of 1999 that some staff at WLCFS would complete this course.

In 1998 the new Living Center reached full capacity. Additionally, the Care Center received a successful makeover. The state health care agency found “no discrepancies” at the Care Center. This was truly a testament to the outstanding staff at Wisconsin Lutheran Care Center. What a blessing from the Lord to have such a loving and caring staff.

Sadly, WLCFS lost one of its divisions in 1998. The Home Health Agency was cut due to an ongoing financial deficit. A study concluded that this Agency was “non-mission fulfilling.”⁹

In place of the Home Health Agency, the WLCFS Board of Directors in 1999 established a new division of service called Family Life Education. What was the mission and purpose of this new division?

“Its primary mission is to strengthen the family through Biblically-based programs. Marriage enrichment retreats, parenting seminars, workshops on the Christian man and woman are currently being offered across the

⁷ *History of WLCFS*, 35

⁸ Addenda I

⁹ *History of WLCFS*, 35

country to WELS congregations...Finally, this new division is responsible for the administration of the World Missionary Support Services program. This ministry, developed at the request of the Board for World Missions of the WELS, provides psychological evaluation of missionary candidates, assistance in orientation and repatriation of missionary families, and on-field services.”¹⁰

WLCFS was not only falling into opportunities in the realm of education, they were also receiving land through gracious gifts. “In 1999, more specific plans were underway to develop thirty-seven acres of land known as the West Bend Property (In the town of Trenton). Plans were in the works for a facility capable of lodging one hundred people. The facility would be used for meetings, conferences, dining and over night lodging.”¹¹

The 1990’s were a time of much change and growth at WLCFS. There was a noticeable statistical growth in counseling, in volunteer hours, and in donations. By God’s grace, WLCFS was able to reach out to more souls than ever. New marketing positions and programs were helping to keep congregations informed. WLCFS wanted its constituency to know they were there for them in times of crisis. They were also going to serve those seeking to prevent crisis. They wanted WELS members to know that they would use sound, Christian methods and theories in counseling.

The new millennium brought more key additions to their healing and helping ministry. WLCFS launched their own website, www.wlcfs.org, which is still active today.

The Family Life Education division introduced a new “Marriage Mentoring” program. Members of local churches were trained to “walk with” a couple during their

¹⁰ *WLCFS Annual Report, 1999*

¹¹ *The Haven, Mid-year 1999*

engagement and the first few years of marriage. However, this program fizzled out in a few years.

A third program of note was the new scholarship program. WLCFS had always been committed to encouraging young people into the realm of social work. In 2000, a scholarship program was offered to Wisconsin Lutheran College juniors and seniors who were studying in the field of psychology and social work.

It is also worth noting that in an effort to continue helping unwed parents “WLCFS served 19 families with their adoption search program in 2000.”¹² Even though the agency lost its state license to place children, they were still committed to serving unwed parents who were looking to place their children in a Lutheran home. WLCFS did all they could to place children in a loving Christian home.

The year 2001 marked the agency’s thirty-fifth anniversary. The organization carried out its mission under the theme of “Serving Families for 35 years.” Special services were held. Special guests were invited. Special guests included synodical officials and past Board members. All thanks to God. He gave WLCFS dedicated and loving staff members.

In 2001, the division of Christian Counseling changed their name to “Christian Family Counseling. The 2001 annual report showed that they had counseled with 1,895 families.

The Family Life Education division bumped its staff up from one person to five people. Ministry support services, a part of Family Life Education, held a two-week seminar at Wisconsin Lutheran College for twenty-five missionaries and lay volunteers.

¹² *WLCFS Annual Report, 2000*

This seminar prepared missionaries who were moving out of the states. It also looked to the needs of those missionaries moving back into the states.

The end of 2001 and the year 2002 brought on new challenges. One such challenge was the events of September 11th. WLCFS was able to shine Gods' light on victims and families of this tragedy. This event was no doubt a tragedy. However, in a way it was a blessing for WLCFS. A group of four staff members from WLCFS, in connection with WELS Committee on Relief, was able to apply the healing and helping message of Jesus.

The tragedy of September 11th did hurt WLCFS financially. The facts were apparent in their annual report. People were not able to contribute as they had in the past. Funds would dip for the next four years. As a result, plans for the West Bend Retreat Center slowed down. Not only was the cost of the facility a problem, but new hotel chains were moving into the area very soon.

In 2002, WLCFS carried out their mission with these few exceptions. Ministry Support Services, part of Family Life Education, trained twelve former missionaries as mentors to help transitioning missionary families.

Interestingly, "They are also looking into a program that will assist our church workers in assessing their professional skills and applying traditional training to enhance their ministry."¹³

Opportunities also arose to do work on the Apache Reservation. Rock Loewen was sent to work with an Apache couple. His job was to equip them to do marriage mentoring and parenting classes.

¹³ *The Haven*, Summer 2002

By the year 2003, the West Bend retreat center was not a reality. However, a new donation of land came to WLCFS. This time sixty-one beautiful acres were donated. The property was near Columbus, WI. Plans began for an adult education center called Oakbrook Meadows. Unfortunately, this too would fall by the wayside as funds were running low. The property was recently returned to its donors.

Ministry Support Services was at work again in 2003. This time they implemented a program to help pastors, teachers and staff ministers who left the ministry. Working with the Conference of Presidents, Ministry Support Services started working on a called worker transition program. They also continued to aid missionaries in transition.

Counseling hours increased eight percent in 2003. Twenty-six therapists were now on staff serving called and lay workers. Additionally, WLCFS formed a new therapy group in 2003 dealing with sexual addictions.¹⁴

The year 2004 brought some changes to WLCFS. On July 30th 2004, Pastor Robert Michel retired as Executive Director. Pastor Michel reflected on his days at WLCFS.

“During my tenure at the agency, I witnessed expansion of services, enhancement of staff and expertise and, most important, the Holy Spirit at work in the individuals and families. WLCFS continues to heal and help. What more could a servant ask for?”¹⁵

Pastor James Mattek accepted a call to replace Pastor Michel as Executive Director.

Another change involved terminology. Family Life Education was replaced with the name Christian Leadership Training and Support Services.

¹⁴ *WLCFS Annual Report, 2003*

¹⁵ *Healing and Helping, Summer/Fall 2004*

2004 also marked a new era in WLCFS publications. *The Haven*, a publication in print since the late 1960's, was dropped. In late 2004 it was replaced by the new publication called *Healing and Helping*.

WLCFS also introduced new practical ways to enhance the faith of young children. Faith Stepping Stones was one such program that was in its early stages.

“WLCFS redirected its family ministry initiatives to focus on Faith Stepping Stones, a new program that successfully debuted last year. Faith Stepping Stones is geared to educate leaders—both called and lay—on the spiritual, emotional and physical development of children, birth to five years old. Once trained, church leaders are then equipped to implement Faith Stepping Stones in their own congregation and provide ongoing education to parents in these important areas. Our new approach to family ministry is important to WLCFS because once again infants and toddlers have become a focal point of our agency, something that diminished over the past 10 years since we ended the adoption program. We thank God that He has once again given us a wonderful opportunity to impact our precious little children.”¹⁶

Faith Stepping Stones is still in use today throughout the WELS.

Another program under development was Youth Peer Leadership Training. This was also part of the Christian Leadership Training division. This program was being designed for Area Lutheran High Schools. This program is also still in existence today.

2005 marked the 40th year of ministry for WLCFS. Upon reflection, the Lord has blessed the efforts of WLCFS beyond what anyone imagined. Counseling grew from one site in the 1960's to more than 10 sites in 3 states. They built a solid reputation for quality care. They built an assisted living center. They remodeled their nursing home facility and added administration offices.

The Faith Stepping Stones program and Peer Leadership program continued to see growth and improvement in 2005.

¹⁶ *WLCFS Annual Report, 2004*

Again, an emphasis was placed on reaching out to called workers in 2005 as well. Rick Loewen stated, "It's not uncommon for people serving in the public ministry to experience emotional setbacks at some point in their career."¹⁷

Staff at WLCFS reached an all-time high in 2005. WLCFS employed 293 people in 2005. This does not include the volunteers who put in more than 22,000 hours.

However, this increase in staff would not last for long. 2006 would bring some difficult decisions for the Board of Directors at WLCFS. In order to meet changes in the world of health care, WLCFS would seek to go in a more professional, specialized direction.

This was especially true in the area of counseling. WLCFS went from 26 therapists in 2005 to 9 therapists in 2006. Christian Family Counseling was definitely going in a new direction. Rhoda Walle, an Educational Therapeutic Specialist, was hired. She provides consultation to WELS teachers regarding student behavior and educational challenges. Another addition was Sheryl Cowling. Sheryl is a licensed clinical social worker. She specializes in treating childhood disorders and trauma-related problems. Another example of specialized care was the hiring of Dr. Brandon Hayes. Dr. Hayes is the Clinical Director for Christian Family Counseling and specializes in treating a variety of mood disorders in adults and in psychological assessment and testing.

Christian Family Counseling also had to close a few counseling posts in the past two years due to high cost. Offices in the Twin Cities, New Ulm, Morton Grove, Onalaska, Wausau, Fort Atkinson and Eau Claire were closed. WLCFS initialized a regional approach to its counseling office locations. Offices now exist in Milwaukee, Appleton, Fond du Lac, Oak Creek and West Bend. The hope for the future is to do

¹⁷*Healing and Helping*, Summer/Fall 2005

long-distance counseling via some form of secure technology. There is also a sub-regional plan in place for the future. The goal for the future of WLCFS was recently revealed in *Healing and Helping*.

“Each regional office will be staffed by a full-qualified psychiatrist and psychologist and by therapists who hold master’s degrees and specialize in an area of care. All of our therapists are in the process of identifying their area of specialization such as marriage, depression, trauma, or substance abuse. This allows our agency to provide expert assistance to those needing focused care.”¹⁸

To reorganize further, the Christian Family Counseling division is now combined with the Christian Leadership Training and Support Services division. These are all under the division heading of Christian Family Ministries.¹⁹

Peer leadership training continues to grow. Peer Leadership Training conferences are planned for 11 of the 22 Area Lutheran High Schools. Faith Stepping Stones also continues to grow and train leaders of the God’s church.

Plans are also in the works to open an assisted living center in Hartford, WI. In the past year, WLCFS has entered into an agreement with Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church and plans to build a 39-apartment assisted living facility. This complex will also include offices for Christian Family Counseling.²⁰ Preliminary plans call for closing the West Bend offices.

WLCFS continues to apply the healing and helping message of Jesus Christ to those in need. They continue to convey true peace to the young, to families, to individuals and to the elderly. Danger and turmoil surround the Christian each day in this world. But, like the bird that nests undisturbed and peacefully on a tree branch

¹⁸ *Healing and Helping*, Fall 2006

¹⁹ Addenda II

²⁰ Diagram of Harford complex in *WLCFS Annual Report*, 2006 pg. 10

overhanging roaring, foaming waters, WLCFS continues to offer true peace. WLCFS offers forgiveness in Jesus Christ. They continue to offer true contentment and peace for all those dealing with the troubles of this life. May God continue to bless their work.

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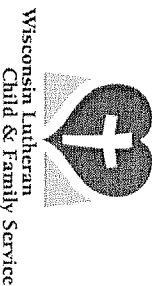
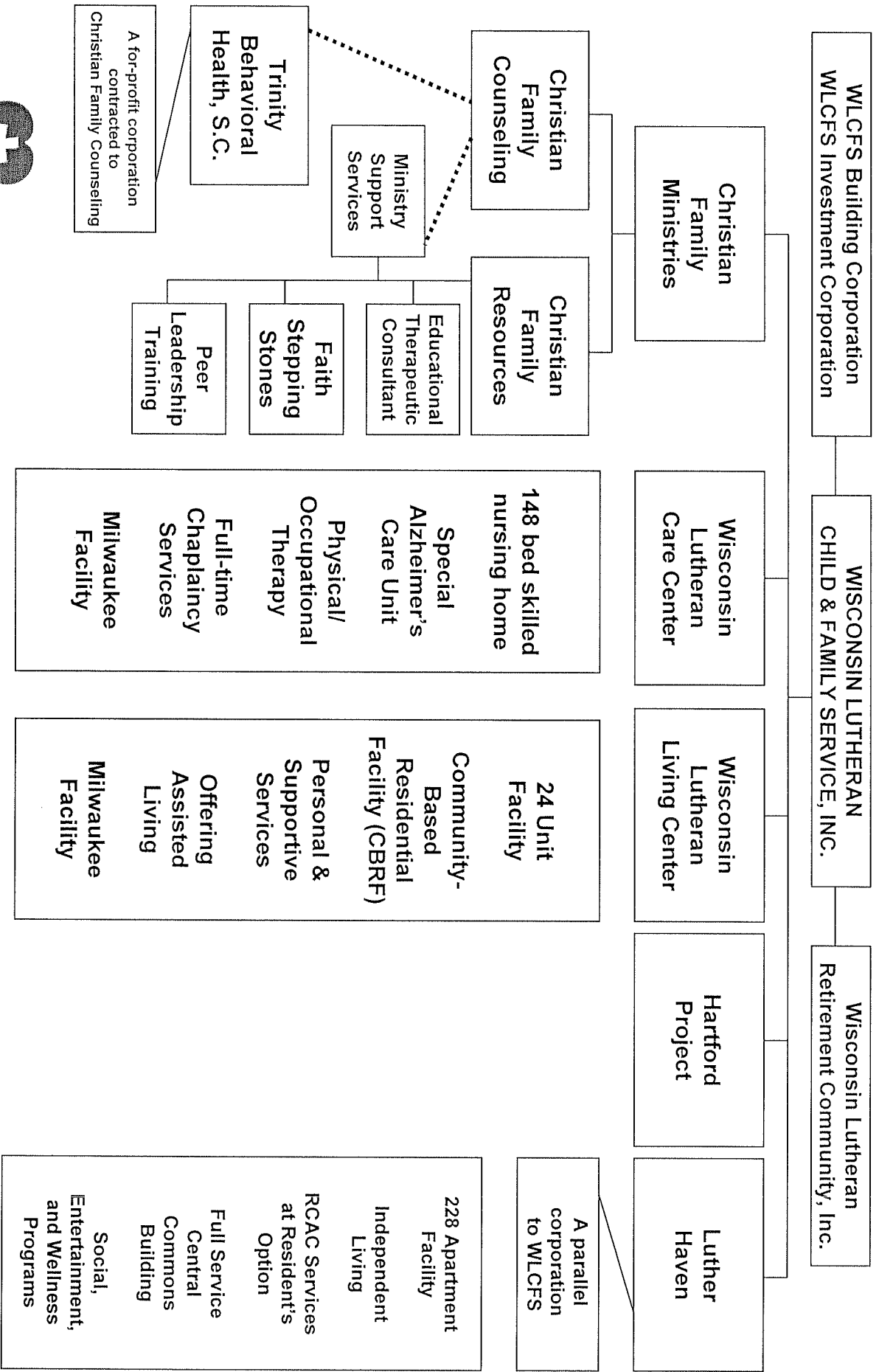
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[Also attached with report: Interviews with WLCFS Executive directors; E.F. Lehninger, Robert Michel and James Mattek]



Organizational Flowchart