



# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

SPRING 2026 | Vol. 38, No. 1

MAGAZINE



**DIVINE SERVANT AWARD**  
Page 9



**FAITHFUL, FORWARD, TOGETHER.**  
Page 12



**WLC TRADITIONS**  
Page 14

## ABOUT US

Nationally ranked and “Courageously Christian,” Wisconsin Lutheran College serves 1,100 undergraduate and graduate students through innovative on-campus and online programming. Located in Milwaukee, WLC pairs academic rigor with a vibrant student experience to forge the next generation of bold Christian leaders. The college is affiliated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

## PRESIDENT

Dr. Daniel W. Johnson

## EDITOR

Melanie Buellesbach

## DESIGNER

Amy Kuether '96

## WRITERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

Adam Heinzen '06

Alex Hennen '27

Michael Kuether '25

Lisa Leffel '98

Michael McLoone

Curtis Wech '09, MA '16

Jeff Wilson

WLC Magazine is available free of charge to students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the college. If you wish to provide feedback, if you prefer to receive the magazine electronically, or if you need to update your address, please visit [wlc.news/feedback](http://wlc.news/feedback) or scan the QR code.



## From the President

Dear Friends,

As I reflect on the remarkable journey of our college, I am struck by God's enduring faithfulness. We often look back at our “then and now” story – from our humble beginnings in 1973, when a small group of visionary Christians taught students in borrowed high school classrooms, to today's vibrant campus of nearly 1,100 students. This history serves as a living testimony to what God can accomplish through vision, faith, and an extraordinary trust in Him.

The energy on campus over the past year has been amazing as our students continue to excel in every area, from the classroom to the court; you'll read more about that in the following pages. However, the true core of WLC is found in the fact that our identity rests not in our successes or accolades, but in being children of God.

As we look toward the future, we are guided by our new collaborative strategic plan: **Faithful, Forward, Together**. This four-year roadmap ensures that we remain faithful to our Lord's teachings while moving forward with innovative ways to deliver an exceptional education amidst tremendous shifts in the higher-education landscape. We also have strengthened our foundation by investing in our greatest resources: WLC faculty and staff. An anonymous \$3.1 million gift has allowed us to more properly compensate those who faithfully mentor our students with a Christ-centered worldview. Praise God for this generous donation!

Wisconsin Lutheran College remains a “Courageously Christian” institution, unapologetic in our witness. Our mission is steadfast: to prepare Christian servant leaders grounded in faith and ready to serve wherever God calls them.

Thank you for your prayers and partnership as we ensure that Jesus remains in every part of the WLC experience for such a time as this.

Blessings in Christ,

Dr. Daniel W. Johnson  
President, Wisconsin Lutheran College

# IN THIS ISSUE

- 2.....From the President
- 4.....WLC's 2025 Graduates
- 6.....Graduate Spotlights
- 8.....Center for Christian Leadership
- 9.....Divine Servant Award Celebration
- 12.....A Four-Year Strategic Plan
- 13.....Campus-Wide AI Initiatives
- 14.....WLC Traditions
- 18.....Faculty, Staff, and Student News
- 21.....Fine Arts Outreach
- 22.....Continuing the Warriors Tradition
- 24.....Athletics News
- 26.....The Class of 1975

SPRING 2026 | Vol. 38, No. 1

**ABOVE:** May 2025 Commencement

**ON THE COVER:** Senior Jayden Hill hoists the 2025-2026 Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference Tournament championship trophy in WLC's Time of Grace Center. The women's basketball team captured both the conference regular season and tournament titles and advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

# Congratulations to WLC's

# 2025 GRADUATES

## May Commencement

**James Biedenbender**, a marketing and finance major from La Crosse, Wisconsin, was the 33rd recipient of WLC's Impact Award. A four-year student-athlete competing in volleyball and three-year team captain, he also served as student body president for two years. James, who earned a Christian Leadership Certificate, was the student speaker at May commencement.



May's keynote commencement speaker and Pro Gloria Dei Award recipient **Dr. John D. Kolander** served in Lutheran education for 44 years at the grade school, high school, and collegiate levels. Provost Kolander held that title at Wisconsin Lutheran College from 2008 until his retirement in June 2025; he served as the college's vice president for academic affairs from 2004 to 2008. In 2018 Kolander was named the Council for Independent Colleges Chief Academic Officer of the Year.



**Emily Buch**, a mathematics major from Milwaukee, is a master's student in mathematics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she serves as an undergraduate course instructor.

**Robert Jenewein** of Kenosha, Wisconsin, majored in communication and sport management. He earned a Christian Leadership Certificate and was a four-year member of the men's soccer team.



**Katie Brown**, a nursing major from Conroe, Texas, is a Registered Nurse in the Emergency Department and Trauma Center at Children's Wisconsin.

**Arnulfo Ortega**, who graduated with a degree in marketing, returned home to Laredo, Texas, where he is a marketing manager for Forza Laredos, a new United Premier Soccer League club.



# December Commencement



**Prof. Paul Burmeister** was the keynote speaker at December commencement. He served at WLC for 21 years before retiring in December. Burmeister was WLC's co-chair and project manager of accreditation, assistant dean of academic advising, school chair of fine arts, and professor of art.

**Viviana Alcantar**, a business administration major from Las Cruces, New Mexico, is a staff accountant with Sikich.



**Quinn Wedel**, a criminal justice major from Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, was a deputy medical examiner intern during the fall 2025 semester.



**Dr. Paul Beck**, professor of history, came to WLC in 1987 and taught history to three generations. He is also a leading scholar in 19th-century American military history and the author of four books. He served as grand marshal for WLC commencement ceremonies, leading the academic procession with the college's mace. Beck retired in December.



**Alissa Keohavong**, a biology major from Oak Creek, Wisconsin, is a clinical research assistant at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. She is preparing to take the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).



**Randall Strutz '16** returned to WLC to earn a Master of Arts in Education – Special Education Leadership. He is director of the Student Success Center at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, where he also serves as head coach of the girls' basketball team.



**Maddie Votsis** of Milwaukee graduated from WLC in May with a degree in sport management and business administration, and in 2026 will earn a master’s degree in sport analytics from West Georgia University.

During her time at WLC, Maddie interned with the Milwaukee Brewers in three departments: Ticket Operations, Brewers Community Foundation, and International Scouting. She networked within the organization to gain a variety of experiences, building her skills in analytics, reporting, and statistics. As she reflected on her Brewers’ experience, Maddie said: “In International Scouting, I learned a lot about reading the

prospect market and valuing players of all types, and my confidence in SQL improved tenfold.”

Maddie also played softball for Team Greece in Canada last summer, which helped build her scouting skills. “I had the honor to represent Greece for the first time as a catcher on the Greek National Softball Team,” Maddie said. “Experiencing the game from on the diamond instead of behind the fence allowed me to observe firsthand each country’s unique approach... This directly informs my work in scouting by sharpening my eye to be aware of such nuances and how they may impact an individual’s data.”



**Emma Ries**, an elementary education major from LaCrescent, Minnesota, took part in the May commencement ceremony. During the fall 2025 semester, Emma completed her student teaching and the Ignite Ministry teaching internship at St. Marcus Lutheran School in Milwaukee. The internship provided a strong foundation for teaching ministry in an urban WELS congregation.

Emma accepted a first-grade teaching position that began in January 2026 at St. Marcus. She is pictured at right with Amber Hodgson, her supervising teacher, and Garrett Mandeville, director of talent and recruitment at St. Marcus.





# Looking Back

## at WLC Grads from 2015 and 2022

We love to see where our new grads plan to serve, but it's also important to see what WLC alumni are accomplishing years later. Here we highlight two alumni at different stages of their careers.



### ANDREW IVERSON '15

In June, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins announced that Andrew Iverson, a 2015 Wisconsin Lutheran College grad who majored in history and communication, was appointed by President Donald Trump to serve as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development state director for Wisconsin.

"It's an honor to serve," said Iverson. "Rural Development is focused on investing in rural Wisconsin with over 70 programs to boost the economy, provide safe and affordable housing, and essential community infrastructure projects."

State directors serve as the Chief Executive Officer of USDA Rural Development in their states or territories and are tasked with leading teams to carry out the mission of Rural Development to the benefit of all rural Americans.

Iverson said he is grateful for his experiences at WLC: "As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran College, I learned a great deal about history and communication, but more importantly, I learned skills like collaboration, leadership, team building and service, which are essential to what I do every day as state director."

Since graduating from WLC, Iverson has served as executive director for the Republican Party of Wisconsin, held positions with the Republican National Committee, and worked in the private sector. He lives in Westfield, Wisconsin, with his wife, daughter, and golden retriever.

### DR. ZECHARIAH JUNG '22

Zechariah Jung, a 2022 WLC grad, earned a Doctor of Osteopathy degree. He graduated from the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (LECOM) in 2025 and is a family practice resident at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) St. Margaret.

Jung earned the Primary Care Award for Family Medicine at LECOM, which is awarded to a member of the graduating class who has upheld the ideals of the osteopathic profession and demonstrated a desire and ability to become a primary care physician as exemplified by an interest in family medicine.

In his UPMC bio, Jung wrote: "I chose family medicine because of its broad scope of practice, the ability to choose your own adventure, and the longitudinal relationships that can be formed with patients."





## EXTENDING EXPERTISE TO OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

The mission of the Center for Christian Leadership is expanding beyond WLC's campus borders through the new Forge Leadership Collective. This external leadership initiative partners with organizations across all sectors to develop managers and employees who serve with purpose and lead with clarity and integrity. The collective offers employer-tailored workshops taught on location and keynote talks for summits and events. From delivering interactive artificial intelligence (AI) workshops at local corporations to CliftonStrengths® training, the Forge Leadership Collective is helping local leaders navigate ethical guardrails and change management with a foundation of faith.

**To learn more about bringing workshops, training, or keynote talks to your organization, contact Jeremy Bock, executive director of the Center for Christian Leadership, [jeremy.bock@wlc.edu](mailto:jeremy.bock@wlc.edu) or 414.443.8935.**

## MAKING AN IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITY

Leadership at Wisconsin Lutheran College isn't just a classroom concept – it's a call to serve. In February, the Center for Christian Leadership hosted its annual Serve2Lead event, where student-led teams from the Christian Leadership Certificate Program stepped onto the Schwan Concert Hall stage.



These students identified pressing needs within the Milwaukee community and developed rigorous Servant Leadership Action Plans. After pitching to a panel of judges, six teams were awarded a combined \$22,000 in grant funding to bring their visions to life. With only nine weeks to execute their plans, these students are currently on the front lines, using their God-given gifts to support local nonprofits and create tangible change in our own backyard.

## HIGH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY DAY

In October 2025, WLC welcomed more than 250 high school students for a day of inspiration and growth. Co-hosted by the Center for Christian Leadership and WLC's Office of Admissions, the High School Leadership Academy Day brought together students from eight area Christian high schools to explore what it means to be a leader.

The highlight of the day was a keynote by Derek Deprey '02, a WLC alumnus and leadership speaker. His message, titled "Everyday Leaders: Small Actions, Big Results," challenged students to focus on four areas of "everyday" leadership: mission, community, tenacity, and gratitude. Following the keynote, students joined breakout sessions and collaborated with other schools to explore practical ways to apply these principles. A special thank you to Wisconsin Lutheran High School's Viking Christian Leadership Academy for bringing 118 of its future leaders to join the conversation!





# Celebrating CHRISTIAN SERVANT LEADERSHIP



## DENNIS QUAID HONORED BY WLC

Wisconsin Lutheran College presented Dennis Quaid with the 2025 Divine Servant Award at a celebration in May at Discovery World in downtown Milwaukee. With 380 guests in attendance, the event raised more than \$788,000 to support student scholarships at WLC.

“We were honored to present the Divine Servant Award to Dennis Quaid, recognizing not only his remarkable artistic achievements but also his genuine testimony of faith.” said WLC’s President, Dr. Daniel W. Johnson. “The evening was a true celebration of Christian

servant leadership and generosity, raising scholarship dollars to prepare WLC students who will boldly impact the world through their faith.”

Quaid is an Emmy® Award and two-time Golden Globe® nominee who’s known for his roles in hit films such as *The Rookie*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Traffic*, *Vantage Point*, *The Parent Trap*, *The Right Stuff*, *Breaking Away*, *Midway*, and many more. In 2024, Quaid portrayed the 40th president of the United States in the biopic *Reagan*.



WLC established the Divine Servant Award in 2017 as an opportunity to honor individuals who exemplify qualities of servant leadership and have exhibited Christian values. Learn more about the event or purchase your tickets at

**[WLC.NEWS/2026-DSA](https://wlc.news/2026-dsa)**

## 2026 RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

Willie and Korie Robertson and Sadie Robertson Huff are more than just television personalities from the hit reality TV shows *Duck Dynasty* and *Duck Dynasty: The Revival*. Over the years, they have become influential voices in American Christian culture, known for their bold faith, commitment to family values, and philanthropic efforts.

Their stories of faith in action and perseverance through fame, all while managing a thriving business, make them highly deserving of receiving Wisconsin Lutheran College's Divine Servant Award on Friday, May 29, 2026, at Discovery World in Milwaukee.

Willie, Korie, and Sadie exemplify what it means to live out one's faith boldly, compassionately, and consistently. Their stories offer encouragement and practical wisdom for Christians serving in a world that desperately needs hope and truth. They will challenge and inspire attendees to live faithfully and lead courageously in whatever calling God has placed before them. It will be a memorable and remarkable night! Tickets are on sale now for \$375 per person. Sponsorship opportunities, which include a personal photo opportunity with the Robertsons, also are available. All proceeds provide scholarship funds for students who want to attend WLC.



## SUPPORTING FUTURE CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Wisconsin Lutheran College believes that Christian leaders are greatly needed in every career field. Many students are eager to attend WLC, but they are unable to handle the cost of college on their own. In fact, 99% of students receive financial assistance from WLC. These Christian men and women count on your generous gifts to make a Christ-centered WLC education a reality. There are many ways to support WLC, its mission, and our students; learn more at [WLC.NEWS/GIVING](https://www.wisconsinlutheran.edu/news/giving). Thank you for helping us ensure that we can impact WLC students well into the future.



# FAITHFUL

## FORWARD • TOGETHER

### A Four-Year Strategic Plan for WLC

As we look toward 2026 and beyond, Wisconsin Lutheran College is preparing to share a new four-year strategic plan that can be summarized in three words: Faithful, Forward, Together.

For 53 years, WLC has remained faithful to our Lord, delivering an exceptional education rooted in a Christ-centric worldview. Today, we move forward – together – innovating during a time of tremendous change in higher education and throughout the world.

We remain faithful to Holy Scripture, to our mission, to preparing students for lives of Christian leadership. We also strive to move ahead with programs, pathways, and practices that students and the world need: forward in innovation (new programs, AI/digital literacy, three-year pathways), forward in experience (internships, undergraduate research, and experiential learning), forward in formation (Jesus-centered culture, CliftonStrengths®, vocation, leadership), and forward in stewardship (service excellence, affordability, efficiencies).

## FOUR STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

  <p><b>01</b></p> <p><b>Academic Growth and Innovation</b></p>	  <p><b>02</b></p> <p><b>Elevate Experiential Learning and Career Readiness</b></p>	  <p><b>03</b></p> <p><b>Strengthen Christian Leadership and Christ-Centered Culture</b></p>	  <p><b>04</b></p> <p><b>Stewardship and Infrastructure</b></p>
---	---	--	---

*“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.” – Psalm 20:7*

# WLC ADOPTS BOODLEBOX to Power Campus-Wide AI Initiatives

# boodlebox



As part of the second point in its new strategic plan (experiential learning), WLC is implementing campus-wide artificial intelligence (AI) initiatives. The college has contracted with BoodleBox, a collaborative artificial intelligence platform, to become the central technology hub for WLC's expanding AI programs. This move will equip WLC students, faculty, and staff with secure, equitable access to top-tier AI models – including GPT-4, Claude, and Perplexity – within a collaborative environment designed for higher education.

The implementation of BoodleBox supports WLC's broader efforts to prepare students to lead in an era shaped by AI, weaving AI literacy across its curriculum, campus culture, and community partnerships. Rather than treating AI as a passing trend or a technical niche, WLC is asking how students and Christian leaders can use these tools wisely, responsibly, and with discernment, in service to others.

BoodleBox addresses the “digital divide” often seen in higher education by providing all students with access to advanced AI tools that typically require expensive individual subscriptions. Crucially,

the platform offers an environment where faculty and students can collaborate on AI-assisted projects without compromising data privacy or intellectual property.

This infrastructure will immediately support WLC's new AI Literacy minor, an interdisciplinary program inviting students from any major to explore how AI is transforming work, communication, creativity, and ethics. The program introduces students to core AI concepts and equips them to use generative media and large language models, all while grounding the conversation in a Biblical understanding of human dignity and vocation.

“AI literacy is now essential, but technical competence alone isn't sufficient,” said WLC's Provost, Dr. Jarrod Erbe. “Through our AI Literacy minor, integrated coursework, and professional development opportunities, we're building on liberal arts foundations, including analytical thinking, ethical reasoning, and effective expression, to develop graduates grounded in our understanding of Christian vocation and prepared for problem-solving and innovation in an AI-driven workforce.”

Within the School of Business, the new platform will be integral to the required AI Fundamentals for Business course. This ensures that every undergraduate business major graduates with relevant experience using AI to analyze information, generate ideas, and support decision-making, while critically evaluating each tool's limitations and risks.

“Our goal is not to replace human judgment or creativity, but rather help students develop the wisdom, ethical grounding, and practical skills to use these tools to augment their thinking and assist in their tasks,” said Curtis Wech '09, MA '16, Director of Marketing and Strategy and an adjunct instructor of AI at WLC.

WLC faculty and staff members are engaging in training focused on pedagogy, academic integrity, and privacy. With these efforts, WLC aims to produce graduates who are wise AI users and discerning leaders. By integrating technical understanding, ethical reflection, and Christ-centered purpose, the college is preparing students and the organizations they will serve to navigate AI with confidence, courage, and care.

# WLC TRADITIONS



Founded 53 years ago, Wisconsin Lutheran College may be relatively young as far as colleges and universities go, but that doesn't mean we can't have well-established traditions. Some of these revolve around holidays and special events, but nearly all involve free food – and what college student doesn't love that? Enjoy a look at several beloved WLC traditions.

# Afternoon Tea

*Take a moment to enjoy a hot beverage and treats!*

Once a month, students, faculty, and staff enjoy desserts and visit with friends at Afternoon Tea in the Galleria. This storied tradition dating back to 1998 is a campus favorite – where we all gather for a social hour and delicious tea, punch, and treats. Campus departments take turns hosting the event throughout the academic year. Overheard at February’s Tea: “The scones are my favorite!”

## FUN FACT:

Afternoon Tea is sponsored by Fava Tea Company. Prof. Bryan Stafford, an assistant lecturer in WLC’s School of Business, is a co-founder and chief marketing and business officer for Fava Tea.



# PHAT Tuesday

*Free food with friends!*

PHAT Tuesday is a weekly late-night opportunity to take a break from studying and grab free food with friends. The treat changes each week and often comes from area restaurants. Olive Garden breadsticks, Panda Express, Qdoba, Noodles & Co., Crave cookies, Kona Ice, hot wings, lumpia, and even fresh fruit – there’s sure to be a PHAT Tuesday that satisfies your cravings.



## FUN FACT:

Head women’s soccer coach Matt Eisold ’10 said that PHAT Tuesday is the one thing that a WLC freshman needs to be sure they experience. “PHAT Tuesday is always a crowd pleaser, and it’s been great to see the variety of foods progress through the years.”



**FUN FACT:**

The winning themes for the 2025 Trick or Treat in the Halls (as voted on by residents) were *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, outer space, jungle safari (also the fan favorite), and *Minions*.

## *Trick or Treat in the Halls*

*Decorate, be a character, and eat candy!*

Trick or Treat in the Halls is a WLC tradition that our freshmen love. Each year, alumni and their family and friends are invited to visit ten wings of our residence halls for a special evening of trick or treating. Our first-year students decorate their halls in a theme of their choosing, dress up, host games, and hand out candy to the kids. Children's books, games, movies, and television shows are common decoration themes. Once the little ones go home, our students get to have their own celebration!



## *Variety Show*

*It's your chance to be a star!*

Each November, students are invited to showcase their talents and impress their classmates at the annual Variety Show, held in the Schwan Concert Hall. Students can also audition to be the evening's emcee. Prizes are awarded for first through third places, as well as the crowd favorite. The Variety Show is an energetic night of student performances and comedy.

**FUN FACT:**

The 2025 Variety Show winning performances were "Unless" by sophomore Amelia Scherwinski, "Myles Harris Experience" by sophomore Myles Harris (also the crowd favorite), and "I'll Get By" by Ben '25 and Jon (sophomore) Thoma.

# Winterfest Formal

*Dress up and dance the night away!*

A treasured tradition, our annual Winterfest celebration at the end of January is an opportunity for hundreds of students to dress up, enjoy a delicious sit-down meal with friends, and dance to the DJ's music at a unique Milwaukee location. The 2026 event was held at the Historic Pritzlaff Building. In previous years students have gathered at the Milwaukee County Zoo, Discovery World, Harley-Davidson Museum, Milwaukee County Domes, and The Factory at Barclay.

## FUN FACT:

This is WLC's oldest student tradition, dating back to 1977, four years after the college was founded!



# WLC Christmas

*Celebrate the joy of the season with friends!*

WLC Christmas, held the week before final exams in December, is a much-anticipated campus-wide celebration of Christmas. The event begins with hors d'oeuvres served in the Warrior Underground, where students can also win gift cards and listen to holiday music from instrumental ensembles. They then proceed to the Chapel for the Service of Light, a beautiful traditional celebration of Jesus' birth that concludes with the lighting of candles during *Silent Night*. The event wraps up with a formal Christmas dinner in the Campus Center, with a menu voted on by students. The event is a great excuse to dress up in your holiday best!



## FUN FACT:

We consume 60 pounds of mozzarella sticks each year at WLC Christmas!

## LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

Following the retirement of longtime Provost **Dr. John Kolander** in 2025, **Dr. Jarrod Erbe** – a professor of biology and academic dean – has transitioned into his new role as WLC’s provost. This shift, along with the retirement of **Dr. David Brightsman** after 23 years of dedicated service in the School of Education, led to the appointment of two new academic deans.

**Dr. Marty Miller '94**, an associate professor of education who has been with the college since 2008, now serves as dean of the College of Professional Studies and Humanities. Additionally, **Dr. Allison Phillips**, professor of biology and former dean of student success, has been named dean of the College of Health and Natural Sciences. Phillips has been a member of the WLC faculty since 2011.

The President’s Cabinet also welcomed new leadership in 2025. **Greg Fictum** joined the college as vice president of development, and **Dr. Rhoda Wolle** returned to WLC as vice president of culture and engagement, having previously served as dean of student success.

In the Office of Student Life, two familiar faces have stepped into expanded roles. **Adam Volbrecht '04** is the new dean of students, where he will continue to support the student experience while maintaining his role as head coach for the men’s golf program. **Jackie Kacmarynski '07** has been named dean of student services, overseeing the Student Success Center, Accessibility Services, and Health and Counseling Services to ensure that students have the holistic support they need to thrive.

## NEW DUAL-DEGREES



WLC is pleased to announce a new strategic partnership with Regent University. This 3+3 agreement, similar to WLC’s successful collaboration with the Marquette University Law School, creates an accelerated pathway for students to earn both a bachelor’s degree from WLC and a Juris Doctor (J.D.) from the Regent University School of Law in Virginia Beach, Virginia.



WLC has also partnered with the Medical College of Wisconsin for a 4+1 Master of Science in Precision Medicine. The Precision Medicine program is a fully online, cutting-edge program empowering healthcare professionals to lead the future of personalized, data-driven medicine. By integrating genetics, environmental factors, lifestyle influences, and advanced analytics into everyday practice, participants master the tools to deliver tailored care that improves individual outcomes.

## REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION

**Dr. Marty Miller '94** and **Prof. Paul Burmeister** presented at the Higher Learning Commission Annual Conference last April. Their presentation highlighted WLC’s two-year leadership process and the efforts of five working teams comprising 20+ faculty and staff that supported the college’s Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2025. WLC has been accredited by the Commission since 1987.



## MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING

In fall 2025, the first cohort in WLC’s Master of Science in Professional Counseling program started classes on campus, beginning their journey to becoming Licensed Professional Counselors.



The George Pólya Awards are given to authors of articles of expository excellence published by the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) in *The College Mathematics Journal*. **Dr. Tova Brown**, associate professor of mathematics, and her co-author Dr. Brody Johnson (a professor at St. Louis University), received the 2025 award for their article titled “Pull-Back Cars: Vehicles for the Instruction of Differential Equations.” The article provides a compelling and innovative approach to teaching differential equations through real-world applications. Brown and Johnson are pictured with MAA president Jenna Carpenter (left) at the award ceremony.

At the 2025 Council of Independent Colleges Institute for Chief Academic Officers in Indianapolis, **Dr. Jarrod Erbe** and **Dr. Allison Phillips** hosted a discussion on the topic of “Prepare, Predict, Partner: Strategies That Drive Student-Athlete Achievement.”



In October 2025, WLC professors **Dr. Ben Washburn** (education), **Dr. Mark Murphy** (education), **Dr. John Werner** (biology), and **Dr. Dan Ebeling '98** (chemistry) represented the college at the 22nd Annual sySTEMnow Conference in Milwaukee, presented by STEM

Forward. WLC’s team collaborated with K-12 educators to strengthen STEM pathways and inspire the next generation of innovators.

**Dr. Rebecca Parker Fedewa '01**, associate professor of English, gave a presentation titled “Engendering Sympathy in the Reader: Why the Humanities Matter” at the 66th Annual Convention of the Midwest Modern Language Association, held in Milwaukee in November 2025.

**Prof. Kristin Gjerdset**, professor of art, took part in a panel discussion titled “For the Love of Artist Residencies” at the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators Visual SciComm Conference in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, in July 2025.

**Prof. Christie Timm**, an education instructor, secured a faculty development grant to attend the World Literacy Summit 2025 at Oxford University in England.

**Dr. Kevin Glaeske**, professor of chemistry, was elected to represent the Milwaukee section of the American Chemical Society as a councilor.

A manuscript authored by **Mikaela Sullivan '22**; **Dr. Jason Paltzer**, executive director of The Meros Center; and **Dr. Wendy Close**, associate professor of psychology, was accepted for publication in *Families in Society*. The article is titled “Faith-Based Partnerships to Provide Holistic Care for Survivors of Domestic Violence.”

**Dr. Karen Fischer '06**, assistant professor and director of the M.S. in Professional Counseling program, had a co-published article in the Vol. 19 No. 4 (2025) issue of the *Journal of Counselor Preparation*

and *Supervision* titled “Evaluating Competencies in Counseling Students: Comparing Adjunct and Core Faculty Ratings.”



Three Education professors – **Prof. Alan Bitter**, **Dr. Mark Murphy**, and **Prof. Kristy Wegner MA '18** (pictured above) – presented at the 2025 WELS National Education Conference held in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in June 2025.



At the college’s annual Faculty and Staff Banquet last fall, we recognized several service anniversaries, including this group, which has a combined 115 years of service at WLC! Thanks to **Jenny Baker** (30 years), **Karen Plamann** (30 years), **Rev. Dr. Joel Pless** (25 years), and **Dr. Kevin Glaeske** (30 years) for all they have done for WLC and our students.

Led by **Rev. Dr. Joel Pless**, professor of theology, three WLC students earned theology credits during a January 2026 tour of the biblical countries of Israel and Jordan. The study tour was hosted by WLC, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and Asia Lutheran Seminary.

**Megan Grow '27**, a computer science and data science major, competitively earned a Department of Energy internship last summer at Argonne National Laboratory through the Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internship program. Her project was titled “Automating Beamline Alignment at APS with Model Context Protocol.”



WLC’s Mock Trial team was one of 25 teams that competed in February in the American Mock Trial Association regional round of the national collegiate mock trial tournament at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This was also the first time that WLC’s new courtroom classroom in Generac Hall was used extensively to prepare students for competition. The college’s Mock Trial team has seven members and is coached by **Dr. Jason Badura**, head of the Politics and Law Program. **Ryan Johnson '22** serves as an assistant coach.

In November 2025, WLC’s senior psychology majors took the ETS Psychology Major Field Test and scored in the 98th percentile among 241 colleges and universities nationwide. This is the second year in a row our seniors have scored in the 98th percentile or higher.



In January, eight third-year nursing students, one WLC alumna, and two nursing faculty arrived in Zambia as part of the NUR 347 Population Health Immersion Trip course. Students gave health and hygiene presentations at Linda Community School in Livingstone. In two days, they presented to 110 students and handed out that many toothbrushes! The students also spent time in three clinics in Livingstone observing local healthcare practices and meeting the healthcare teams.



**Richard Hill '27** (physics major, pictured above) and **Ryan Henning '27** (mathematics education major, pictured below) had abstracts accepted to present at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research this April in Richmond, Virginia.



Sport and Exercise Science (SPE) seniors **Jose Argueta** (above, left) and **Morgan Misna**, alongside **Dr. Lukas Ryan**, assistant professor of SPE, presented their poster titled “Return to Running Performance Following Tibial Stress Fracture: A Case Report” at the American Physical Therapy Association – Wisconsin Chapter Fall Conference in Wisconsin Dells. WLC’s team was the only undergraduate group presenting a poster at the conference.

Last summer, Henning competitively earned a spot in an NSF-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates, the Appalachian Mathematics and Physics Site at Marshall University. His project was titled “Developing a Predictive Ensemble Model for H1N1.”

**Annelise Eckmann '28** presented a poster titled “Optical Spectra of Zinc Phthalocyanine-Substituted Myoglobin” at the American Chemical Society – Milwaukee Local Section poster session at Milwaukee School of Engineering in December.



# Fine Arts OUTREACH

## WLC offers on-campus music opportunities

At Wisconsin Lutheran College, the stage is never empty and the learning never stops. Through clinics, camps, and retreats, WLC's Music Department extends its mission far beyond the traditional college classroom. By welcoming prospective students in middle school and high school to the Center for Arts and Performance, the college serves as a vibrant hub for artistic growth, development, and the celebration of God-given musical talents.

### HIGH SCHOOL JAZZ FESTIVAL

In January, the WLC Music Department hosted its annual High School Jazz Festival. This weekend culminated in a concert featuring performances from participating schools and a closing set by the Honors Jazz Ensemble, directed by Prof. Daniel Hubert, director of instrumental music, and Dr. Jeremy Zima '07, professor of music.

The festival provided a platform for young musicians from the following schools to showcase their hard work and connect with the WLC community: Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Illinois Lutheran High School, Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, West Bend High School, and Wisconsin Lutheran High School.

The impact of the weekend was echoed on social media, with West Bend High School Bands noting, "WLC Jazz Fest 2026 was a blast! Thanks to our students for putting in a long day and giving a great performance." Similarly, Kettle Moraine Lutheran shared: "We had a great day of learning, got to spend time with friends, and saw many KML Band alumni perform with WLC's Band!"

### GRADE SCHOOL BAND CAMP

Summer on campus was punctuated by the sounds of the 24th Annual WELS Summer Band Camp this past July. For six days, 55 students and 20 staff members gathered to explore music and art through Christ-centered activities, projects, and music-making opportunities. The week concluded with a concert, where students displayed the progress they made.



WLC OFFERS A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS EACH SUMMER, INCLUDING YOUTH CAMPS. Visit [WLC.NEWS/SUMMER](https://www.wlc.edu/news/summer) to learn about the 2026 WELS Band Camp, new WLC science camps, Warriors sports camps, and more!



## THREE FAMILIES, TWO GENERATIONS, **ONE LEGACY**

### *Continuing the Warriors Tradition*

At Wisconsin Lutheran College, the women's basketball team takes the court every game wearing warm-up shirts that clearly display their priorities: God, Family, Warriors. This season, those words carry an extra layer of meaning. For the first time in program history, three mother-daughter pairs are represented in the women's basketball program.

Freshman Madeline Leffel (#25) and sophomores Abby Cole (#22) and Taylor Ignatowski (#3) are carrying on a tradition started by their mothers – Lisa (Kosloske) Leffel '98, Paula (Brauer) Cole '99, and Anne (Sonnabend) Ignatowski '96 – who once played for the Warriors themselves.

Anne, Paula, and Lisa shared a basketball season together, bridging Anne's senior year and Lisa's freshman year. Now their daughters play together on the same court, wear the same green and white in their uniforms, and also proudly represent the Warriors – all under the guidance of Coach Klay Knueppel, who served as their mothers' assistant and now leads the program.

The Warriors tradition runs through these families: not only did the moms attend WLC, but the dads – Dan Leffel '99, Jeff Cole '97, and Mark Ignatowski '95 – are WLC alumni as well.

"We're thrilled that God led Abby to WLC just as he led us there. There is nothing better than having God be at the core of your college years, whether it be in the classroom or on the court," said Paula Cole, reflecting on what WLC means to her family.

"WLC is definitely a special place. My parents met at WLC, so without the college I wouldn't even be here," Abby Cole added. Now she gets to wear a piece of her family's history, turning her parents' old WLC sweatshirts and gear into her own Warriors wardrobe. "I love having these vintage pieces – it's like carrying a bit of their WLC story with me."

"There was never a question for Madeline where she would go to college," said Lisa Leffel, highlighting the family legacy. "Her parents, brother, sister-in-law, aunt, and uncle all went to WLC and treasured their time there."



#25



#22



#3

Madeline explained: “While my friends toured multiple colleges, I only visited WLC. I knew I wanted a small Christian school with strong academics and a great basketball program – and WLC has been the perfect fit since day one.”

Taylor Ignatowski pointed out her family ties: “WLC is more than my college – it’s my parents’ alma mater and a place that has shaped our family. My mom and I were even coached by the same person, Coach Klay, giving us a unique bond through the memories we’ve made in this program.”

“It’s pretty cool seeing Taylor play for Coach Klay. I had a great experience playing at WLC, and I’m grateful she also gets this opportunity,” Anne Ignatowski said, reflecting on history repeating itself.

“It’s unique to coach even one second-generation player, but having three players on one team is remarkable,” noted Coach Klay Knueppel. “Anne, Paula, and Lisa were part of the program’s early years, helping lay the foundation. The fact that their daughters chose WLC says a lot about the college’s emphasis on

spiritual growth, strong academics, and a great athletic experience. It’s great to see Taylor, Abby, and Madeline keeping the Warriors tradition going.”

The program’s history of excellence began with the late Wayne Smith, who passed away in November 2025. A mentor to Klay and a member of the Paul F. Knueppel Athletics Hall of Fame, Smith served as WLC’s head coach for 16 seasons, guiding the program’s early players and establishing its success. Since then, Klay has taken the program to even greater heights, elevating the Warriors to national prominence. In February, the Warriors captured their 16th conference tournament title and made their 14th NCAA Tournament appearance.

Once teammates themselves, Anne, Paula, and Lisa now cheer from the sidelines as their daughters carry on the Warriors tradition. Madeline Leffel reflects on the impact: “Playing at WLC isn’t just basketball – it’s about faith, family, and being part of something bigger. Abby, Taylor, and I are all proud to carry on the legacy of being WLC Warriors.”



1994-1995 Warriors Women's Basketball Team



2025-2026 Warriors Women's Basketball Team

**NEW SPORT  
ALERT!**



# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE **WARRIORS** **FLAG FOOTBALL**

## **WOMEN'S FLAG FOOTBALL IS COMING TO WLC**

Wisconsin Lutheran College announced in February the addition of women's flag football as the college's 21st varsity sport. The program will make WLC the 10th college or university in the state of Wisconsin to sponsor the sport. The Warriors will also become the sixth member of the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference (NACC) to offer women's flag football at the varsity level.

"This exciting addition reflects our ongoing commitment to expanding opportunities for female student-athletes and providing experiences that develop leadership, teamwork, and competitive excellence," said Jeremiah Hoffmann, director of athletics. "Women's flag football is one of the fastest-growing sports in the country, and by bringing it to WLC, we're creating another pathway for talented women to compete and make a lasting impact both on and off the field."

The rapid growth of the sport nationally has fueled its expansion at the collegiate level. Women's flag football was officially added to the NCAA's Emerging Sports for Women program at the 2026 NCAA Convention and is on track to become a full NCAA championship sport by 2028.

Beyond the collegiate landscape, women's flag football continues to gain prominence worldwide. The sport will make its Olympic debut at the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and is currently sanctioned at the high school level in 17 states, creating a growing pipeline of student-athletes prepared to compete at the next level.

Women's flag football is played in a fast-paced 7-on-7 format, with average team rosters of approximately 25 players. The Warriors will begin competition in Spring 2028 at Raabe Stadium.



## **WOMEN'S BASKETBALL NEWS**

Margie Stevens, a junior forward from Oneida, Wisconsin, became the 20th player in program history to surpass 1,000 career points during a victory over Aurora in February. The Warriors secured their 14th 20-win season in program history while capturing both the conference regular season and tournament titles. WLC also won an NCAA Tournament game for the fourth time in program history.

# A Season of Change in Warriors Athletics

Wisconsin Lutheran College said farewell to three long-time Warriors Athletics staff members in 2025-2026 and welcomed new staff members to campus.



After serving WLC Athletics for more than three decades, **SKIP NOON** retired in June 2025. Under Noon's leadership, WLC Athletics

underwent significant facility upgrades – including development of the Outdoor Athletic Complex – and the addition of several sports, including football. In 2006, Noon spearheaded WLC's move out of the Lake Michigan Conference into the newly formed Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference. In his 25 seasons as head men's basketball coach, Noon won more games than any coach in Warriors men's basketball history (318). He led his teams to six conference championships, two NAIA Tournament appearances, and the program's first NCAA Tournament berth.



With Noon's retirement, WLC named **JEREMIAH HOFFMANN** as its new director of athletics.

Hoffmann joins the Warriors with a strong track record in athletics leadership, having served for six years as athletic director for the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's Fond du Lac and Fox Cities campuses. He managed the multi-campus athletic programs and developed sponsorships, while also coaching men's basketball and men's golf. He is a certified PGA Professional. Hoffmann is already familiar with the WLC campus, having served for the last two years as director of WLC's Sport and

Recreation Management graduate program, where he created a 4+1 program, recruited students and adjunct faculty, and formed dual-credit partnerships.



## STEVE TRAVIS

retired in December 2025 after a distinguished 33-year coaching career with the Warriors. He was instrumental in

shaping WLC's cross country and track & field programs since their inception. After arriving at WLC in 1993 as a cross country club coach, Travis guided the program to intercollegiate status in 1994. He developed long-standing events that have become staples within the program, including the Grade School Challenge, Warrior Invitational, and Warrior 5K. Cameron Ausen '07 takes over the Warriors cross country programs and serves as an assistant track & field coach.



Head men's soccer coach **JOE LUEDKE** stepped down from his position in February after 26 seasons leading the Warriors to

take on a full-time role with a local soccer club. Luedke, the second-longest tenured head men's soccer coach in the NACC, departed as the winningest coach in program history with 161 career victories. The Warriors hired Steve Bode as their new men's soccer coach. A native of the Milwaukee area, Bode brings nearly two decades of NCAA Division I coaching experience to WLC.

## FOOTBALL NOTES

WLC and My24 Milwaukee had a broadcast partnership in 2025 that brought all five of the Warriors' home football games to viewers across southeast Wisconsin. Each game aired live on My24 Milwaukee and simulcasted on the WLC Athletics YouTube channel. The broadcast team featured Scott Warras '03 on play-by-play, WLC's founding football coach Dr. Dennis Miller as color analyst, and Rev. Wayne Shevey on the sidelines.



## DREW MEARS

, a senior punter from Appleton, Wisconsin, was selected as the

Wisconsin Football Coaches Association Private College Special Teams Player of the Year. Mears, also a First Team All-NACC honoree, delivered one of the most productive punting seasons in program history. He punted 43 times for a school-record 41.3-yard average, ranking 13th in NCAA Division III.

## HALL OF FAME

In September, WLC inducted five new members into the Paul F. Knueppel Hall of Fame. Jenny (Ebeling) Biebert '15, Abby (Mahsem) Davis '19, Jen Dowden '19, Jacob Jodat '17, and Dr. Dennis Miller were the eighth class inducted into the Athletics Department's Hall of Fame as part of Homecoming weekend. Congratulations!



# WLC'S CLASS OF 1975

## *Pebbles That Started the Ripples*

In 2025, the Class of 1975 celebrated its 50th reunion – a golden milestone for a group of students who weren't just the first graduates of the new college, but its trailblazers, ambassadors, and lifelong supporters. As they gathered to reminisce on two separate occasions, the memories came rushing back – from choosing the school mascot to forming student government, helping to lay the foundation for Wisconsin Lutheran College's future.

### ON THE GROUND FLOOR OF SOMETHING SPECIAL

When WLC opened in 1973, it wasn't the obvious choice for most students. It had no campus of its own, few faculty members, and no library. But for a small group of committed young Christians, that's exactly what made it exciting.



"I liked the idea of being part of something new – getting in on the ground floor," Laurie (King) Stirmel '75 recalled.

"I really didn't know what direction I wanted to go after high school," Dave Kremer '75 shared. "Taking general courses in a Christian environment just made sense – and it didn't hurt that my dad was on the Board of Regents."

Some students lived at home and worked during the day, attending evening and weekend classes. Others came from out of town and stayed at the college's dormitory – a house affectionately nicknamed "The Monastery."

### LIFE AT THE MONASTERY

Located across from Wisconsin Lutheran High School, where classes were held, The Monastery was much more

than student housing – it was the heart of WLC in those early years. The three-story house had a chapel, kitchen, dining room, laundry area, finished basement with a ping-pong table and pool table, seven bedrooms, and five bathrooms.

"There was no food service, so we pooled our money every week, went grocery shopping across the street, and took turns cooking the meals," noted Stirmel.



With no library, groups would pile into a car and head downtown to the Milwaukee Public Library to complete assignments.

"It was all we knew, and we loved it," Kremer said. "The camaraderie was amazing. Being such a small group [there were just 15 students in the class], we had no choice but to get along – and that created friendships that lasted a lifetime."

### FAITH, FUN, AND FOUNDING TRADITIONS

Life at WLC was as much about Christian fellowship as it was about academics. Students organized a student council, launched a student newspaper, and formed a committee to present slideshows at church and schools to recruit new students.

Faculty regularly welcomed students into their homes for meals, and in return, they joined students for holiday parties held in the basement of The Monastery. Faculty taught courses with as few as two students and would tutor



# Celebrating a bold beginning and five decades of enduring impact



after class. “Most of our professors gave up their evenings and weekends to help us,” Sue (Goese) Thoma ’75 said. There were lighter moments, too: a legendary 24-hour ping-pong marathon to raise money for library books because WLC needed a library to obtain accreditation, epic water fights, and Saturday morning basketball games in a city league – complete with green and white uniforms, tight shorts, and knee-high socks.

And yes, it was this class who voted to make green and white the official colors and chose the Warriors as the athletics nickname. “The other option was purple and gold Kingsmen,” noted Stirmel. “I still get chills every time I see that green and white WLC banner. We made the right call.”

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

As graduation approached, the Class of 1975 drafted an initial college constitution and even recommended the college’s first full-time president. Pat (Harris) Johnson ’75 famously suggested Dr. Gary J. Greenfield for the role. Students Tim Johnson ’75 and Nancy (Lauber)



Schultz ’75 visited him at his home and encouraged him to accept the position.

“We saw him digging the foundation of his house with a hand shovel – doing the hard work himself – and we knew he could take WLC to the next level,” Tim remembered.

## A LEGACY THAT LIVES ON

Today, WLC is thriving with a vibrant campus, a wide array of programs, and students from across the country.

“It’s hard to feel a typical alumni connection when everything looks so different,” Kremer admitted. “But we’re so proud of how far WLC has come.”

In fact, for many, WLC has become a family tradition – some spanning three generations. Mark Stirmel ’75 and Laurie’s daughter, Stacey, graduated from WLC in 1999, and their granddaughter is a current student. Kremer added: “My twin brother and I went to WLC, then my son Daniel [’04] enrolled, and now my grandson is talking about it too.”



While much has changed, one thing remains constant: deep gratitude for a Christ-centered education that shaped lives, careers, and families.

Members of the Class of 1975 want today’s students to know: “We pray for you. God has blessed all of us who have attended this college – whether it was in 1975 or in 2026. Big things happen with Christ at the center.”

The Class of 1975 may have been small in number, but its impact still ripples outward. “We were pioneers, and we often laughed about it. We knew we were just a pebble – but look at the ripples we started,” shared Laurie Stirmel.

Fifty years later, those ripples are still going strong at WLC. The Class of 1975 remains a testament to what God can do through faithful people, humble beginnings, and the courage to believe.

**PICTURED TOP LEFT:** Bruce Braun, Kathy (Schoen) Steckman, Mark Stirmel, and Tim Johnson

**PICTURED TOP RIGHT:** Mark Stirmel, Dave Kremer, Sally (Crozier) Hadler, Tim Johnson, Sue (Goese) Thoma

# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

8800 West Bluemound Road  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226-9942

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 3335  
Milwaukee, WI



“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

- Deuteronomy 31:8 NIV

WLC.EDU | 414.443.8800