



Small Group Workshops

2022 WELS International Youth Rally University of Tennessee, Knoxville

On Wednesday and Thursday (June 29–30) of the rally, four time slots are set aside for small group workshops. Twenty-eight options are listed below (15 spiritual for all attendees, 11 recreational run by University of Tennessee staff for youth, and 2 for youth leaders).

- *Youth leaders may choose to attend any spiritual workshop and are strongly encouraged to attend the two youth leader workshops that are specifically tailored to adults. Please save the spots in the recreational workshops for youth.*
- *Workshop options are subject to change and will be closed as they reach capacity.*

Scenarios:

- *If you choose an off-site excursion Wednesday, choose two spiritual workshops on Thursday.*
- *If you choose an off-site excursion Thursday, choose two spiritual workshops on Wednesday.*
- *If you do not choose an excursion, youth may choose one spiritual and one recreational workshop each day (no more than one recreational workshop each day). Youth leaders, please choose all spiritual or youth leader workshops.*

SPIRITUAL/EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

S1: “Who Am I?” The Crisis Among Teens Today

This session will involve an in-depth look at the real-life problems that teens experience today. These many problems often overwhelm teens with feelings of being unloved, worthless, guilty, anxious, lonely, and more. To fight this, we will look to establish and root our identity in Christ through the facts of God’s Word instead of personal feelings. Along with exploring the identity crisis among teens, this session will also offer suggestions for how to serve and encourage teens, as well as activate them in ministry. The information for this session comes from careful research and intimate knowledge of teen life over years of ministry.

Pastor Phil Huebner was assigned from the seminary to start a new mission in Palm Coast, FL, where he served for nine years. For the last six years, he has served as the campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran High School. He received a second master’s degree from our seminary in 2016 and his doctorate in ministry in 2019 from Concordia Theological Seminary. His whole ministry to date has been among families and youth. He is married to Becky and has two children, Noah (15) and Gwen (12).

S2: Superhero Training: Bystander Intervention Strategies

In Acts 20:35 Paul wrote, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” In this workshop participants will discuss unhealthy behaviors they see, like dating violence, bullying, and harassment. Youth will start to gain the knowledge and skills they need to intervene safely and give help instead of doing nothing.

Participants will learn and practice three intervention strategies: Distract, Direct, and Delegate. They will explore how to intervene safely and when to seek help from friends or adults.

Michelle Markgraf is the current interim executive director of Ivy House, a home where families in crisis can safely leave children so they can deal with the crisis. She has helped WELS congregations learn how to help survivors of sexual and domestic/dating violence. Previously, Michelle was a volunteer rape crisis advocate and served as executive director at a rape and domestic abuse center.

S3: “Where’s God when . . . ?” Responding to Faith Challenges

The phone rang. “Pastor, I can’t get the picture of the dead body out of my head.” Another teen wrote in an email, “Because of college and my mom’s cancer, it feels like the world is crushing my family.” Another asked, “My friends all hate me. Where is God now?” Another drifted away and never returned phone calls or texts. His dad said, “He’s trying to figure things out on his own after his mom left.” These struggles aren’t unique to just those four real examples. It’s not a matter of IF your faith will be challenged; it’s a matter of WHEN. And when that happens, God is never against us or far away. Instead, the One who knows the depth of every challenge is also the One who brings us through them and makes us stronger because of them.

Caleb Kurbis has been a pastor at Living Savior in Asheville, NC, since 2011. He and his wife, Sarah, have four kids. From teen groups in the church to coaching youth in the community and meeting young adults for conversations at local coffee shops, there are plenty of opportunities to talk about challenges in life and our Christian faith. In addition to meeting new people and learning their stories, he loves to teach, spend time with family and friends, and spend time in the outdoors of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

S4: Live Your Best Life—Be Purposefully Ordinary

No one wants to be ordinary, do they? We want to believe we are special and that we are amazing. We want to do riveting and powerful things in our lives and for others. We want to be Esther-like and serve in momentous ways. But what if that’s not happening? What if, at this moment, you have no idea how to decide on a path or feel like a failing friend or family member? This workshop will help you look at yourself differently—as a person God designed and works through to be extraordinary in ordinary ways and at times when it appears less than special. We will work together to see our choices and our relationships as ways to live that purposefully ordinary, best life God puts in front of us.

Karen Fischer is a licensed professional counselor in the state of Wisconsin and program manager for Christian Family Solutions. A graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran College and Concordia University-Wisconsin, she holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a MS in education and professional counseling psychology. She also finds it a privilege to serve as an adjunct professor of psychology at Wisconsin Lutheran College. Karen’s experience in adolescent group therapy and young adult counseling has given her opportunities to help young people learn that just as physical exercises strengthen the body, mental health exercises strengthen the mind and allow individuals to be the best stewards of their

gifts and talents. Her belief and life's work are the integration of the Christian faith as the focus of mental wellness practice so that individuals can better take their thoughts captive and find the peace that passes understanding through the grace of God.

S5: All In! (God Turns Disaster Into Opportunity!)

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Moved by God's love for us, we are "all in" burnt offerings . . . totally committed to serving God and others with our lives since God was totally dedicated to serving us in Christ. This workshop is dedicated to dreaming, sharing, and living as teens who are "all in" servants of our Lord today and tomorrow.

Pastor Richard Warnecke was as a tutor for 2 years at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, the South Atlantic District youth discipleship chairman for 10 years, and served on the synod's Youth Discipleship Committee for 12 years. While a pastor at Kingdom Workers for 12 years, he organized a number of mission trips for over 1,500 high school young adults. He has also recruited and trained a number of high school students for Christian Aid and Relief disaster action trips. He believes that our young adults are the church of today whose talents and time can be utilized in service of God and people. Pastor Warnecke is outreach pastor for Christ Lutheran Church in Pewaukee, WI, and serves on the committee of WELS Christian Aid and Relief as volunteer coordinator for disaster relief.

S6: Fight Like A Girl (for females only)

The world sets impossible standards and tries to define us, but you're an original. Get practical tips to fight the storms of life and the lies and embrace God's unique purpose for you! Don't miss this fun, interactive workshop where we'll celebrate being women!

Rachel Greiner strives to live the motto, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Her pro-life experience and passion for empowering others have led her to speak to groups across the U.S., in South America, and on national radio. Rachel is the education and programs director at WELS Lutherans for Life in Milwaukee. To get her attention, simply mention food. 😊

S7: Man Up! (for males only)

The world needs you now more than ever. In a world that wants to define you, corner you, and insult you, God reaches through and redeems masculinity for his great purposes. Join us for this fun, honest, and interactive workshop as we learn how God wants us to man up.

Pastor Matt Westra serves Living Promise in Morristown, TN. He is married to his best friend, Rachel, and together they have three children. Matt and his family love the water and being outside and calling the hills of East Tennessee home.

S8: Creating Mental Health Resilience: Strategies for Thriving in a Stressful World

COVID-19 has changed life as we know it. The isolation, unrest, and inundation of stressful news can make us feel anxious, overwhelmed, out of control, and hopeless. This presentation will define mental health self-care and barriers to it. It will outline patterns that lead to anxiety and distress and will discuss strategies we can use to not only improve our mental health but also help support those around us. Discussion and reflection are encouraged!

Dr. Jennifer Londgren is an associate professor in the Health Science Department of Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN, and the program coordinator for the Alcohol and Drug Studies Program. She is a licensed marriage and family therapist, a nationally certified counselor, and a board certified telemental provider. Dr. Londgren frequently presents at state and national conferences on topics related to mental health, social media, drug trends and prevention, and innovative teaching strategies. She developed a passion for self-care and has been presenting extensively on the topic through COVID-19 to educators, parents, and other mental health providers.

S9: Apologetics: Defending the Faith by Caring for the Skeptic

Christian apologetics can be described as “defending the faith using reason” or, from 1 Peter 3:15, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason (*apologia*) for the hope that you have.” Yet there is more to the story. Apologetics is a ministry of caring. We care about the doubts of skeptics and believers alike. While Christians cannot produce faith in dead hearts, we can knock down faulty arguments against the Christian message and make a positive argument for the Christian faith. In this breakout session, we will explore ways to think and speak clearly about our faith. From there the Holy Spirit does his work.

Rev. Dr. Michael Berg is an assistant professor of theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, WI. Along with Dr. Kerry Kuehn, a physicist, Berg offers a one-week summer class called “Practical Apologetics” for anybody interested in apologetics, including high schoolers! He is married to Amanda. They have three daughters: Abigail, Noelle, and Sophia. Dr. Berg is also the author of Vocation: The Setting for Human Flourishing and of an upcoming book on baptism from Northwestern Publishing House.

S10: All Things LGBTQIA+

What do you believe? Is it okay to be gay? Love is love, right? Is this really a choice? Aren't people born this way? And what about gender identity? Is gender fluid? Shouldn't all people be treated equally? Why does this issue get more attention in the church than other issues? Did Jesus even talk about this? What about all the Old Testament laws nobody follows anymore, but we still insist on this one? Who am I to judge? What does the Bible say? Come join us as we consider all sorts of questions on this issue and turn to our Savior to find his answers and his love for all people.

For nearly two decades in ministry, Pastor Bill Monday has encountered many Christian people struggling with the issue of homosexuality. In his efforts to address all matters of LGBTQIA+ systematically (Rainbow Savior), he has also been able to help assemble a team of people who can speak authoritatively on this issue from the Scriptures. This ministry is called Reclamation, now formalizing under WELS Special Ministries. Pastor Monday serves in Appleton, WI, at 922 Ministries (St. Peter and The CORE) as their family pastor. He and his wife, Lori, have been married 22 years and have four kids ranging in age from 11 to 19.

S11: “You’re Never Too Young to Talk About Jesus”

As a teenager, it can be frustrating to be told you are too young to do things like drive a car or see certain movies. Thankfully, this is not the case when it comes to telling others about Jesus. Young people are not just allowed to tell others about Jesus; they often have special opportunities to do so. Join Pastor Roecker as he helps you understand why telling others about Jesus is so important and provides practical suggestions on how to capitalize on your opportunities to do so.

Pastor Eric Roecker serves as the WELS Director of Evangelism. He has been married to his wife, Mary, for 24 years. They are blessed to be the parents of a 19-year-old son, Rees, and a 16-year-old daughter, Riley. Pastor Roecker enjoys spending time with his family, traveling, reading, and playing golf.

S12: College Prep 101: Steps to Stand Firm in Your Faith on a College Campus

Going to college is a big life change. That change often comes with significant challenges to faith. In this session we will identify some of those challenges and seek guidance from the Savior to stay strong in our faith throughout our time in college. We will find joy in the Savior who began the good work of faith in us and trust that he will carry us in the faith to our home in heaven.

In his ministry, Pastor Jon Bilitz has had the opportunity to teach high school students for 17 years. He has been involved in campus ministry for the last 14 years. For the past 5 years, he has served full time as the campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel in Madison, WI. Go Badgers!

S13: Connecting With Anyone

Do you ever feel like it's hard to really connect with someone else—whether a classmate, parent, teacher, employer, or really just anyone? Real communication today is probably harder than ever, but there are ways to make it a lot easier. In this workshop we will explore how to start, grow, and strengthen relationships by breaking down communication barriers and learning some secrets that work in improv comedy to make it happen. And because it's with the comedians of Fish Sticks Comedy, it'll be a fun and interactive session!

Performing coast-to-coast, Fish Sticks Comedy is the nation's largest Christian improv comedy team. Our family friendly brand of improv is high energy and designed to bring people closer to each other and their communities—something that is also embodied in our improv-based workshops offered on a variety of topics.

S14: What You Always Wanted to Know About Your Synod but Were Afraid to Ask (only offered on Wednesday)

What is this thing called the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)? What makes it unique and distinct from other church bodies? Why should you want to be and remain a part of WELS? Why are you an important part of the synod? How can you make a difference through your membership in the synod? What are some of the challenges that you will face as a member of WELS? What are some of the opportunities before you as you carry out your mission? These are just some of the questions that will be explored in this workshop. But even more important, the presenter will be ready to answer any and all questions you might have about the synod, its mission, and the biblical truths it holds and proclaims. Get your questions ready!

Pastor Mark Schroeder has served as the president of WELS since 2007. Prior to that, he served for 18 years as president of Luther Preparatory School, one of our synod's two ministerial training prep schools. He has also served as a pastor at congregations in Fond du Lac, WI, and Maitland, FL. President Schroeder and his wife, Andrea (he married his high school sweetheart), have four grown children and six grandchildren. They live in Watertown, WI.

S15: Behind the Scenes With Koiné and a Discussion on the Power of Music (only offered on Thursday)

Ever wonder what it is like to be in a touring band? Are you curious about what kind of gear Koiné uses and why? Do you have questions about how Koiné comes up with their arrangements and writes songs?

Well this is your chance to find out! Get a behind-the-scenes look at the band and the stage up close through this workshop, which will be held around the actual stage in the arena. This session will also include a discussion on the power of music and why it is so important in the church and in the life of a Christian.

Koiné: Common Language. Common People. Extraordinary Message.

Koiné strives to find a unique balance between the familiarity of classic hymn melodies and the raw instrumentation of new arrangements.

Interesting Koiné Facts:

- *Established in 2003, Koiné began as a worship band for one church in downtown Milwaukee.*
- *Koiné has released eight full-length albums, selling over one hundred thousand hard copies, and is approaching two million digital streams of their songs.*
- *Koiné’s mission has evolved into creating quality digital worship resources that may be used all over the world. Resources include sheet music, guitar charts, worship backgrounds, accompaniment tracks, lyric videos, videos with musical notation built in, and more! Check out koineworshipmedia.com for details.*

To find out more or to join their support team, visit koinemusic.com.

YOUTH RECREATIONAL WORKSHOPS

RUN BY UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE RECREATION STAFF

R1: Badminton

Grab a racquet and send your birdie flying!

R2: Basketball

Lace up your high-tops and strap on your headband. You can play this fast-paced game with your friends to claim the “conference title.”

R3: Flag Football

Pass, run, or juke, just don’t let them get your flag!

R4: Kayaking

Cool off at this awesome session while you practice the wet exit, strokes, and even roll techniques that all beginner kayakers need to know!

R5: Rock Climbing

Get a grip on the session that is a fun challenge for climbers of all levels.

R6: Racquetball

Grab a racquet and serve up on your opponent!

R7: Sand Volleyball

Don’t miss this chance to get down and dirty at the sand volleyball court next to the Aquatic Center.

R8: Soccer

GOOOOOOOOAL! The world’s most popular sport is looking for the next champion!

R9: Tennis

We're serving up a good time on the hard court for all you netters out there.

R10: Ultimate Frisbee

Don't miss your chance to get in on this favorite!

R11: Whiffle Ball

Come play America's favorite backyard game.

YOUTH LEADER WORKSHOPS

EACH YOUTH LEADER WORKSHOP IS OFFERED ONCE WEDNESDAY AND ONCE THURSDAY

L1: #SocialMediaBootCamp (1:00 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday)

Billions of monthly active users are on social media, and your teens help make up this number. Is your church or youth group missing out if you don't communicate this way? You only have one volunteer to run your accounts; what social media tools really work without having to chase after every trend? In this workshop for youth leaders, we will discuss best practices for your church brand awareness, how to create an impactful social media strategy, and, as a group, share tips and tricks. Communication, marketing, and graphic design are all on the table for discussion in this workshop.

Carolyn Sachs is the director of communications at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. She grew up in a pre-social media world but soon found it creeping into the communication and marketing community without any real rule books. Originally from La Crosse, WI, she received her bachelor's degree in 2004 from Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee (before Facebook!) and in 2019 completed her master's in strategic communications from Michigan State University (with the help of Facebook!). Carolyn has been working behind the scenes (and posting on social media) for the WELS International Youth Rally since 2009.

L2: ADVENTURE: Conquering the Comfort Zone & Creating Real Relationships (2:45 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday)

Changing the mindset of our youth is key to shattering self-imposed limits, creating meaningful experiences, and building real relationships. Adventure activities and experiences will revolutionize the way that your groups interact and support one another. Show teens their true potential and how to value one another, all while challenging each person individually. Adventure theory changes everything! Come and see how this model can change the way you interact with the group that you lead and create lasting change for your personal ministry.

Jake Unke graduated from Martin Luther College (MLC) in MN, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in 2015 with his master's degree in physical education, and MLC once again in 2021 with another master's in educational administration. He serves as the high school principal at Divine Savior Academy in Houston, TX. He has a passion for physical education, specifically alternative and outdoor activities, as well as presenting to like-minded individuals who aren't afraid to step outside the norm and push the limits of what education can mean and the forms it can take. Jake is married and has a son and a daughter, as well as two dogs. He enjoys anything that challenges his comfort zone, especially outdoor adventures.