



Our God is...Almighty

How strong are you?

If you want to see incredible physical strength, watch “The World’s Strongest Man” competition. To win, the competitors have to do such demanding feats as lift 300-pound, round stones onto a pedestal, flip huge tires over and over, and pull large buses—in the least amount of time.

Such strength pales in comparison to the almighty power of the one true God.

God’s power isn’t limited to a competition, and he doesn’t use it to win prizes for himself. God uses his power for our benefit.

The greatest proof of God’s almighty power is when Jesus was raised to life after being crucified.

Jesus had the weight of the world on his back in the form of every sin of every person for all time. We rejoice because he was willing to lift the heavy weight of sin off us and endure the excruciating pain of dying on the cross in our place.

Jesus was humbled, but only temporarily. Three days later, God showed his almighty power when Jesus became the only person to overcome sin, death, and hell.

The Apostle Paul writes, “By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also” (1 Corinthians 6:14).

Jesus won the victory of eternal life. He gives the hope of heaven to all people. Now that is a feat of strength!

God is not done revealing his almighty power. On the Last Day, Jesus will return to earth to raise our bodies back to life and to reunite them with our souls. We may be weak, but God uses his strength for us. Trust in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Worship with us during the Easter season. Together we can rejoice in God’s almighty power.

WELS NEWS April 2021

Synodical Council Winter 2021 Meeting

The Synodical Council (SC) held its winter meeting last week via video conference.

The SC reviewed the financial results of the last fiscal year as well as the end-of-calendar year results for Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO). Across the board, both in terms of the synod’s ministry financial plan and regarding the financial position of the synod’s departments, schools, and subsidiaries, the financial situation of the synod is much healthier than was expected. The SC acknowledged thanks for God’s blessings on our synod and its congregations.

In view of the healthy financial situation, the SC approved an expenditure of \$400,000 to be used to fund some of the items on the “unfunded priority list.” The SC Ministry Committee, with input from the President’s Advisory Council, will determine in April which ministries will receive this funding.

The SC gave its final approval to the ministry financial plan (budget) for the next biennium that will be recommended to the synod convention in July. The plan, adopted unanimously and with the support of the Conference of Presidents, calls for a 2 percent increase in expenditures in each of the next two years.

The SC also resolved to move ahead with its recommendation to change the synod pension plan from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan. A defined contribution plan would work more like a 401(k), giving called workers their own retirement accounts. The details of the plan were shared last year and will be shared again this spring before being considered by the synod in convention in July.

The SC made the following appointments:

- To the Board of Directors of the WELS Church Extension Fund: Mr. Seth Hanson, Mr. Tim Gensmer, and Mr. Ron Kerr were reappointed for another term.
- To the Board of Directors of the WELS Investment Fund: Mr. Joel Luehmann, Mr. John Wenker, and Mr. Seth Hanson were re-appointed for another term.
- To the Retirement Program Commission: Mr. Lee Miller was re-appointed for another term; Rev. James Turriff was newly appointed.
- To the VEBA Commission: Mr. James Gabriel was newly appointed.

- To the Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors: Mr. Joel Raasch, Mr. Matthew Groth, Rev. Steven Pagels were re-appointed for another term.

Communications Director Mr. Lee Hitter reported that during 2020 wels.net had more than two million visits to the website, with users in the U.S. and throughout the world making use of the digital content.

Technology Director Mr. Martin Spriggs reported that a third-party security firm was engaged to do a thorough assessment of hardware, software, security policies and procedures, as well as employee training. A preliminary report has been received and will be reviewed for appropriate recommendations to technology systems and practice. He also reported that hundreds of hours have been devoted to updating the CMM phone system to Microsoft Teams Telephony.

Director of the Ministry of Christian Giving Rev. Kurt Lueneburg reported that from 2010-2019 total congregational offerings have increased from \$295 million to just over \$345 million. Over that same period, the percent of congregations' dollars given to CMO has decreased from 7.1% to 6.2%. He also reported that over the past 15 years \$102 million has been given or committed to ministerial education and missions through the WELS endowments, managed by WELS Foundation. It is expected that distributions from these eight endowments will exceed \$1 million in 2021 for the first time.

Serving with you in Christ,

WELS President Mark Schroeder

Potential New World Mission Fields Identified

More than 7,000 people groups in the world live without access to the good news of Jesus Christ. With these unreached people groups and the Great Commission in mind, a group of three world missionaries were tasked with researching where WELS might have the opportunity to plant new world mission fields. "Sixty years ago, WELS World Missions sent missionaries to find prospects, plant churches, and raise up leaders," says Rev. Larry Schlomer, WELS World Missions administrator. "Today, most of our current missionaries are involved in mentoring and training leaders who will carry on the gospel ministry in many countries. We are searching for opportunities to go back to square one: where the only reason for heading to a new country is that they do not have Jesus."

Three new unreached people groups were identified as potential mission field opportunities:

Ethnic Thai in Thailand

While WELS has had a presence in Buddhist Thailand before, the Thai people have been largely unreached by previous efforts. Even most other missionary groups have focused on non-Thai, Hill Tribe people. The Thai are very proud of their language, history, culture, and religion, and leaving Buddhism for another religion is considered an abandonment of what it means to be Thai. WELS has a small foothold with the Thai people, something other mission groups cannot claim after decades of work. WELS is in a unique position to build on a foundation already laid in Thailand to reach this new group.

Wolof people in Senegal

The country of Senegal in Western Africa has a population of almost 17 million people. The Wolof tribe makes up about 40 to 45 percent of the total population and is less than 0.01 percent Christian. Despite the fact that Senegal is an overwhelmingly Muslim country, the constitution staunchly defends freedom of religion and is a relatively peaceful and stable place. It would be the goal to send in two resident missionaries to begin sharing the gospel and gathering a congregation.

Tequila Villages of Mexico

Three WELS missionaries and a handful of other confessional Lutherans have visited villages in this region. No religious group other than Roman Catholics were found working there. Churches in the area are houses of Mary, not houses of God. It appears this may be one of those places where little to no gospel ministry is occurring at this time. While WELS has partnered with a national church in Mexico before, this area is largely unreached by confessional Lutheranism.

World Missions is also exploring outreach opportunities in London. More than 50 WELS-connected families have been identified for a potential new congregation in the capital of Great Britain. With the Lord's blessing, it is the prayer that such a congregation could provide a springboard for further work on the continent.

Plans are currently being made for more thorough follow-up research as well as multiple exploratory trips to each location. Schlomer says, "We pray that these explorations will allow us to send missionaries who will learn a language and culture from scratch, plant churches, and start the long journey of raising up leaders who will be able to pastor them in the future. While much more time is needed to investigate, plan, and prepare for potential mission work in these areas, please pray for these efforts as we look to share the gospel message in more places!" Learn more about WELS World Missions at wels.net/missions.