

Update From Vietnam

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lord is always with his church. Christians in the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam are continuing to reach out to lost souls. In 2020, the Holy Spirit brought more than 12,000 Hmong people throughout Vietnam to faith in Jesus. The Hmong Fellowship Church has grown from 126,000 to 138,000 members.

Rev. Zang, one of the Hmong leaders, said, "Most of the pastors in the Hmong Fellowship Church have heard many scary things through television and radio about the impact of COVID-19, but they see it as less dangerous when compared to the lost souls who have no chance to hear the gospel before they die."

Rev. Fong and his evangelism team reached out to many villages in his area. The Lord blessed their efforts, and they were able to establish nine new mission congregations.

The Lord also has provided a way for WELS to continue training the Hmong Fellowship Church leaders. In November, the Vietnam mission team responded to the request of the Hmong Fellowship Church and offered Zoom training to 57 students. WELS provided phones and internet connectivity when needed to allow these students to participate in online training classes. Rev. Joel Nitz taught the gospel of Mark, and Rev. Bounkeo Lor taught law and gospel. Instruction via Zoom is something new for the Hmong Fellowship Church, but the students were very excited. Some students even asked permission for their wives and parents to join the training as well.

While the Hmong Fellowship Church has been tremendously blessed, there are also some big challenges ahead. More than 1,360 leaders are waiting for someone to train them in the Word of God. They are also waiting to build more churches for new believers to worship their Lord. Lor explains that the Hmong Fellowship Church leaders are very skilled at doing evangelism in their communities. With proper training and materials, these men will continue to share God's Word.

The theological education center building project in Vietnam is still active but has been delayed due to COVID-19. Once Lor is able to visit Vietnam, he will arrange a Zoom or face-to-face meeting, if possible, between WELS and Vietnamese representatives. The government also wants to make this project happen as quickly as possible.

Lor shares that brothers and sisters in Vietnam send their greetings and say, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!" to all WELS members. They appreciate your help and support, especially to train their leaders in the Word of God. They also ask for your continued support and prayers.

Read more from Pastor Bounkeo Lor, Hmong Asia ministry coordinator, [in this Missions Blog from December 10.](#)

WELS NEWS **February, 2021**

Conference of Presidents Makes Changes to the Synod Convention

At its January meeting last week, the Conference of Presidents (COP) examined its options for holding the synod convention this summer, in light of disruptions caused by COVID-19.

The Conference of Presidents (COP) is responsible for planning the synod convention, which was scheduled to take place July 26-29, 2021, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

At its meeting, the COP discussed the feasibility of holding the convention as planned, since it is impossible to know whether the current restriction on the size of gatherings in Michigan will remain in place, whether travel difficulties will remain, and whether travelers from certain states will still be required to quarantine after travel. In addition, the COP recognized that a significant number of people may not be comfortable with traveling, gathering in crowds, or staying in a dormitory.

In view of these uncertainties, the COP considered three options:

Have the convention as normal in Saginaw, hoping that the situation changes by July.

Cancel the convention and entrust the Synodical Council to make necessary decisions.

Hold a "mini convention" with a reduced number of in-person delegates and the remainder of the delegates attending virtually.

Recognizing that it is impossible to know what conditions will be like in July and at the same time wanting the business of the synod to be carried out as close to normal as possible, the COP chose the third option: to hold a mini convention. Here is how it will work:

The convention will take place in Watertown, Wis., at Luther Preparatory School, since Wisconsin has been less restrictive in its COVID-19 guidelines than Michigan.

All delegates still will be assigned to floor committees. Each floor committee will have a chairman, a secretary, and lay representative appointed by the synod praesidium. These committees will meet via Zoom in early July to discuss their assigned area of the Book of Reports and Memorials as well as to discuss broader issues such as the ministry financial plan, memorials, bylaw changes, and the pension issue. Synodical area of ministry advisors (representatives) will attend the appropriate floor committee virtual meeting and present any necessary information. The committees will formulate their reports and resolutions and submit them for editing and formatting prior to the convention.

Only the chairmen, secretaries, and one designated layman from each floor committee will attend the convention in person. This means only 50 to 60 delegates will meet in person instead of the normal 400. These in-person delegates will be authorized by their floor committees to vote on behalf of those who will not attend in person. The number of advisory delegates also will be limited. There will be no displays other than unmanned displays of synodical areas of ministry.

All elections will take place electronically prior to the convention, with voting open to all delegates.

The convention itself will be run as normal, with opening worship on Monday evening. The number of special presentations will be limited. With elections already completed and resolutions prepared ahead, it's likely the work of the convention will be completed in two days, Tuesday and Wednesday.

The convention will be livestreamed to enable all voting and advisory delegates to observe. Delegates will be able to communicate with their chairmen during the convention if they have questions or comments.

The districts will be asked to appoint the same delegates to the next synod convention in 2023 so that they don't miss the opportunity to attend a synod convention in person. Delegates will have the option to attend or to decline. No congregation will be charged the convention fee for this year's convention.

The Conference of Presidents and the convention planning committee will likely make additional decisions and adjustments as needed.

An Important Advancement for Martin Luther College's Campaign

The Martin Luther College (MLC) administration and governing board are excited to announce a significant advancement in the Equipping Christian Witnesses (ECW) campaign pillar designated to campus facilities. Thanks to the gift of two generous donors, the new athletic center is fully funded.

After extensive interviews, analysis, and research, MLC's comprehensive campus site plan identified two priorities: residence space and indoor athletic space for sports teams, physical education training, and student life. For that reason, an athletic center and a residence hall were included in the facility improvement pillar of the ECW campaign.

MLC is thankful for the gifts received from many individuals, congregations, and schools throughout the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. MLC is also thankful for the support it has received from the New Ulm community. Those gifts provided a generous financial foundation for facilities, and now, God has moved the heart of two very generous donors to provide a transformational gift to the athletic center that will allow construction to commence.

The athletic center, named the Betty Kohn Fieldhouse, will be located at the MLC Athletic Field Complex west of the main campus, near the

soccer and baseball fields. This 36,000-square-foot indoor turf facility will feature large practice areas, baseball/softball batting cages, golf simulators, and locker rooms. In April, the MLC campus family will celebrate the groundbreaking of the fieldhouse, with student use anticipated by the beginning of 2022.

MLC President Rich Gurgel commented on this milestone of the Equipping Christian Witnesses campaign: "We are thankful to God for the generosity of so many people. The Betty Kohn Fieldhouse will serve our student body well. It is also a significant beginning to our long-range plans for making our campus even more attractive to prospective students. And we look forward to exploring how the fieldhouse can serve the recreation needs of the New Ulm community as well."

Serving together with you in Christ,

WELS President Mark Schroeder

Mid-Year Graduation at Martin Luther College

Even though on-campus learning at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., has been interrupted for a time, we are happy to see that the work of the college to prepare young people for the public ministry continues. One visible reminder of that is the announcement that 22 students have completed their studies and have received their diplomas and graduated mid-year.

While most of those students will defer their assignment into the public ministry until next spring, several of them will be assigned to their field of labor when the Assignment Committee meets on Fri., Dec. 18.

Plans have been put in place to welcome students back to campus in January. In addition, President Richard Gurgel has announced that the governing board of Martin Luther College will be distributing an additional \$200,000 in financial assistance to help students who return for the second semester.

Even in difficult times, God's work—and his blessings—continue in our congregations and in our synod.

On behalf of all who work with you and for you in our synod's mission, have a blessed Christmas!

Serving together with you in Christ,

WELS President Mark Schroeder