

Uhlhorn will provide onsite assistance to the congregations and counseling and training to the new missionaries who are called to serve them. This support is crucial in guiding mission congregations on the way to becoming self-supporting congregations.

"I'm no church expert or mission guru, but I have served WELS congregations from coast to coast, and I have been on the 'other side'—the mission board side of things," says Uhlhorn. "And so whatever a pastor or a congregation or a district mission board needs, I am willing to do that to help them find souls who do not know Christ as their Savior and give them every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with those people."

Free concludes, "Opportunities continue to abound to share the gospel. Looking to capitalize on ripe fields in North America, the WELS Missions team is thankful that the Lord has provided these three men to serve in counselor roles. May their respective ministries be blessed so more souls hear about our Savior, Jesus Christ."

Learn more about WELS Home Missions at [wels.net/missions](https://wels.net/missions).

### **WELS Endowment Fund Finishes In 90th Percentile Of Commonfund Study**

WELS Foundation is pleased to report that in the recently released *Council on Foundations—Commonfund Study of Investment of Endowments for Private and Community Foundations*®, the WELS Endowment Fund's 2019 net investment return of 22.39% placed in the 90th percentile of the 265 foundations that participated in the study.

The better the investment returns for the WELS Endowment Fund, the more the fund earns. And the more it earns, the bigger the distribution checks will be to our ministries that have an endowment fund through WELS Foundation—and those distributions help fund gospel work. In fiscal year 2020, WELS Foundation distributed over \$2.9 million to WELS ministries through the WELS Endowment Fund. We praise God for his blessings!

To set up an endowment fund or to learn more about how an endowment fund can support your ministry for years to come, visit [wels.net/foundation](https://wels.net/foundation).

## **WELS NEWS** **January, 2021**

### **Good News Regarding WELS Health Insurance And Pension**

Here is some welcome news for congregations that might be facing some financial struggles during this difficult time. Last August the WELS VEBA Commission offered a one-month premium holiday for the WELS VEBA Group Health Care Plan. No premiums were charged to calling bodies for WELS VEBA for that month.

The WELS VEBA Commission has also announced that there will be no increase in the 2021 premium rates for WELS VEBA. The commission is pleased to provide this rate stability to help support WELS ministry efforts. WELS VEBA health plan rates for 2021 are [available on the Benefit Plans website](#).

In addition to steady health care rates, the WELS Benefits Plans Office has implemented a Pension Plan contribution holiday during the October 2020 quarter. No contributions were charged to calling bodies for pension benefits this quarter. This is a savings of \$1,132 per full-time called worker and a total of about \$5 million in savings across all of WELS.

Finally, there will be no increase in the 2021 contribution rates for the WELS Pension Plan. Maintaining the 2020 contribution rates will adequately fund projected Plan benefits and expenses in 2021.

Both the WELS VEBA Commission and the WELS Retirement Program Commission are pleased to take these steps to help support WELS ministry efforts. The savings resulting from the premium holidays and the "no increase" rates should result in significant savings for calling bodies.

For calling bodies experiencing financial hardship, these decisions will be a welcome blessing. Many congregations, however, have been blessed with a healthy financial situation. If that's the case with your congregation, you might want to consider using these savings in other ways. Some suggestions are:

- A one-time additional gift to the synod's general operating fund or to a specific area of ministry
- A special gift to a designated foreign mission

- A gift to the Equipping Christian Witnesses campaign at Martin Luther College
- Providing tuition assistance to a student preparing for the ministry
- Establishing a fund to purchase the new WELS hymnal in the fall of 2021
- Providing help to families in need in your community or giving a special gift to WELS Christian Aid and Relief

We are thankful that God continues to bless our synod and our congregations with the resources necessary to carry out the mission he has given us.

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder

### **WELS Home Missions Team Expanding**

Over the past several months, the WELS Missions team has expanded, welcoming three mission counselors to support the work of our home missionaries, mission congregations, and campus ministries across North America.

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions, says, "Home Missions is excited that these three men recently accepted counselor calls. Each pastor—Neil Birkholz, Dan Lindner, and Wayne Uhlhorn—provides years of ministry experience in his respective field. We pray the Lord will use their unique gifts to enhance and expand the ministries they support."

In June 2020, **Rev. Neil Birkholz** accepted the call to serve as the WELS Asian ministry consultant for WELS Joint Missions, after serving as a missionary in East Asia for six years. Birkholz's new role is based out of Reformation, San Diego, Calif., where he serves as an associate pastor in addition to his position in WELS Missions.

In this newly created role, Birkholz assists North American congregations in designing and implementing outreach programs to reach their Asian community members, in addition to working with individuals to improve their personal Asian intercultural witnessing skills. Another key part of his work is equipping international high school and university students to share the gospel when they return to their home countries. Birkholz also supports the mutual work between world mission efforts in Asia and home mission efforts to Asian people in North

America. He says, "When I visit WELS churches, there exists a desire to answer the call of the Great Commission by making disciples of all nations. With God's blessing, our churches and schools will be places where people from all backgrounds are welcomed to know their Savior. We pray that through these efforts God would use our Asian brothers and sisters in the faith to take the gospel to places and peoples in Asia that we cannot reach at this time."

**Rev. Dan Lindner** recently accepted the call to serve as campus ministry mission counselor, starting in his new role Nov. 1. He previously served as a parish pastor at St. John's, Minneapolis, Minn.; campus ministry pastor at True North (the WELS campus ministry at the University of Minnesota); and as vice chairman of the WELS Campus Ministry Committee.

In this brand-new role, Lindner will work to strengthen and support existing campus ministries, encourage high school students (both domestic and international) to connect with a campus ministry, work with congregations to start and maintain active campus ministry programs, and equip domestic and international students to share their faith with family and friends wherever they call home.

"The Campus Ministry Committee wants the young adults from our synod who attend college to continue to walk faithfully with their Savior," notes Lindner. "We also want all people to know about their Savior. College and university campuses are vast mission fields." Lindner is grateful for the privilege of helping called workers and congregations with campus ministries as an encourager and equipper with tools, resources, and a listening ear. "My hope is that the Lord blesses the partnership in the gospel that we have across our church body as we work together to serve our WELS students and those they encounter on their campuses."

**Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn** accepted the call to serve as a home mission counselor in late October 2020 and will begin his new position Jan. 1, 2021. Uhlhorn is currently a parish pastor at Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif., and previously served as the Board for Home Missions chairman. He will be one of four home mission counselors who assist home mission congregations throughout North America.

In his role, Uhlhorn will work with four district mission boards to find, evaluate, and develop new home mission locations. In addition, once new home mission congregations are established,