

WELS NEWS

(2019 Synod Convention From July 29-August 1 Recap)

September 2019

Rev. Schroeder Delivers President's Report

On Tuesday morning WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder provided an overview of the mission and ministry work WELS is privileged to conduct as well as some blessings and challenges the church faces.

Contemplating the idea of contradictions, Schroeder explained that what seems like a contradiction in a Christian's life—or a church body—is no contradiction at all: "The details of our future may be unknown to us on the one hand, but on the other hand we know exactly what God has in store for us, since he himself has promised that all things—all things—will work together for our good and will be used by him to carry out his good and gracious will."

Along with sharing highlights of the work of WELS Missions, Ministerial Education, and Congregational Services, Schroeder provided encouragement for the work the synod does and will do together and called for a recommitment to stand firm in the Word and share that message with the world, passing it along to the generations to come.

Here are some excerpts from his report:

"The Lord Jesus has entrusted his saving gospel, as well as all the truths of Scripture, to us believers and disciples. Our stewardship of those gifts involves two important and compelling responsibilities. First, we need to hold on to those truths for ourselves. That involves committing ourselves to remain faithful to the doctrines that we have learned. It involves defending God's truth against all attacks from within and without the church. It means recognizing our Lutheran heritage, based solely on the truths of God's Word, as a treasure to be embraced and retained no matter what the cost. But the second responsibility is one that flows from the faith and joy that the gospel has worked in us. That is the responsibility to share that good news with our children, with our friends and neighbors, with our communities and country, and ultimately with the world. And that message is not just for us and our families and for people today. It's a message that we will want to preserve and proclaim for the generations to come.

"As part of a renewed effort to preserve God's truth now and for generations to come, we have begun to focus our attention and efforts on how we can be more faithful in that stewardship of God's blessings. The commissions of Congregational Services are leading the effort to focus our attention on encouraging faithful and zealous efforts to reach the lost, nurture the saved, regain the straying, enrich

and preserve our worship, and grow in our practice of faithful Christian stewardship. At this convention, you will hear much about innovative new resources that will be made available to congregations as they strive to enhance their efforts in gaining and retaining members and in the area of faithful Christian stewardship. It is my prayer that you will take what you learn back to your congregations, circuits, and districts. We don't know what God has in store for us if these efforts are carried out faithfully across the synod. But we know with certainty that he will bless those efforts in his own way and in his own time. His Word—and we depend only on his Word—will not return to him empty.

“Since we do not know exactly what God has in store for us, today is a day for recommitment. A recommitment to standing firm on his unchanging and powerful Word. A recommitment to sharing that message with the world and passing it along to the generations to come. A recommitment to live in the joy and freedom of the gospel. A recommitment to support the work with generous Christian giving. A recommitment to defend God's truth when it is attacked and to witness to God's truth when given the opportunity. A recommitment to support and encourage one another in Christian love and fellowship.”

Schroeder summed up his message, saying, “In a time when we worry about the future—at home, family, church, work—it's really important that even though we don't know what the future holds, God holds the future in his hands. That confidence guides the work we do as a church and gives us every reason to do our work with joy and leave the results to him.”

Rev. Mark Schroeder Re-Elected As Synod President

Delegates re-elected Rev. Mark Schroeder as synod president.

“It is truly humbling that you have placed this trust in me again, and I can assure you that it is a privilege that I thank God for every day that I get to serve you as your synod president,” Schroeder said to the delegates as he accepted the call. “Please continue to keep me in your prayers and God's church in your prayers.”

Schroeder was first elected as president in 2007. This will be his fourth four-year term.

Rev. Joel Voss, pastor at Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, was also re-elected as the synod's second vice president. He already has served in this position for two-and-a-half terms, elected first in 2009.

He too accepted his call. “For three decades of parish ministry and now a decade of serving our synod, I have experienced every day what you also experience—that when you serve the Lord Jesus out of love for him, you are always blessed back from God more than you gave,” said Voss. “It's been a pleasure to serve our synod, and I appreciate your prayers and your support.”

Elections for members of various WELS boards and commissions will continue. Keep up-to-date on election results at wels.net/2019synodconvention.

Looking Ahead For The Generations To Come

Rev. Jonathan Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling, presented his essay topic following the theme of the convention, "For the Generations to Come." In his presentation he provided an overview of current church membership trends, not just in WELS, but in Christianity across America, as well as the social and cultural factors that contribute to these trends.

The heart of Hein's message focused on the real motivation for the work of WELS as a church body and its individual congregations—sharing the love of Christ, as Christ commanded in Matthew 28:19,20. In examining membership decline, Hein noted that, if trends continue, WELS could lose anywhere from 260 to 400 congregations in the next 20 years. Hein attributes this decline to a few cultural shifts in recent years, including the acceptance of religious pluralism, secular humanism defining modern morality and ethics, the erosion of the traditional family, and increasing distrust in churches as institutions. Meanwhile, 25 percent of Americans in 2019 identify as having no religious affiliation, an increase of more than 70 percent in the last decade.

"We're facing very real and large challenges, but the way the Lord always works, he takes things that look bad and makes them good," says Hein. "We need to seek first that we're glorifying Christ."

He stressed the importance of creating a Christian community through relationships and building friendships with people God puts in our lives.

Delegate Daniel Douglas, principal and teacher at Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan., says, "It was comforting to reinforce my approach as a principal – that it's about the importance of relationships. When you have a relationship with people, then that can open the door for ministry."

Rev. Jim Strand, pastor at St. Paul, Bloomer, Wis., says the idea of encouraging members to let their light shine is critical to standing out today. "If you let your light shine, then people might ask why, and then you can proclaim Jesus. That's the best evangelism program."

In his presentation, Hein said: "We will help our members see the face of Christ in their neighbor. We will encourage them to build authentic friendships with those currently outside the church. Hospitality will be a core value among us. We will do whatever is necessary to knit our members into something more than acquaintances. They will have a family. We will zealously, almost recklessly, pursue the straying."

"If we are doing all we can with the gospel, the numbers do not

matter,” concluded Hein. “Only the gospel can create faith, but we need to do a better job of creating an audience for the gospel.”

Presentations Highlight Mission Opportunities

Delegates had several opportunities to learn more about mission work at home and abroad on this first day of the convention.

The morning started with women from the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society (LWMS) presenting the 63 flags of the countries where WELS is actively partnering in gospel outreach. Ms. Emily Kom, who just completed serving as LWMS president, greeted the delegates on behalf of the 60 LWMS circuits around the U.S. and Canada.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, and Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry for Christian Giving, then shared more about the amazing opportunity that WELS has to train Hmong pastors and leaders in the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam. Through a synodwide campaign called Grace—Hmong Outreach in Vietnam, congregations and individuals have given more than \$1.5 million of the \$2 million needed to support the building of a theological education center and ministry education costs for a two-year period---. This funding will allow WELS to provide seminary-level education for 350 pastors and catechism training for an additional 2,500 leaders, who will in turn share the gospel with the more than 120,000 members of the Hmong Fellowship Church.

Delegate Joel Bradtke, a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., was moved by what he heard about WELS’ work in Vietnam. He served for 14 months in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War. “Like a lot of veterans, I came back from the experience uninjured physically yet still carrying the baggage of participating in a war,” he says. “It is healing for me to think about the door that the Lord has opened. We’re finally able to beat our weapons of war into plowshares—sharing the gospel—and into pruning hooks, pruning away the idolatry and misconceptions that some of the people we are reaching will have. I’m just grateful for the opportunity [for WELS] as well as for the healing that this gives me.”

Delegates also heard an overview of other exciting things happening in World Missions from Schlomer. Then they were able to dig deeper into several ministries at the evening’s missionary presentations. There they learned more about the work in Latin America, Hong Kong, and South Asia. They also heard about home mission outreach in Castle Rock, Colo., and Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions, will present more about the opportunities in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking West Indies in his report tomorrow.