

WELS NEWS

April, 2017

Synodical Council Approves Ministry Financial Plan Recommendation

The Synodical Council (SC) held its regular winter meeting on February 24-25. At that meeting it finalized and approved the 2017-19 Ministry Financial Plan (budget) it will recommend to the synod convention this summer.

Areas of ministry began work on the plan in April 2016 with a directive from the SC that the planning should assume no increase in synod support. The directive was given in view of declining Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) and flat support from other sources.

Last November, the SC reviewed the support forecast, and although the forecast hadn't improved, the SC determined that ministry needs justified greater use of reserves. At its February meeting, the SC approved the 2017-19 support forecast and affirmed that a \$3.2 million drawdown of reserves in the Financial Stabilization Fund (FSF) was prudent based on ministry needs and opportunities.

The FSF still has a healthy balance for the short term, but the SC recognizes that this level of drawdown is not sustainable in the long term. Inflationary pressures are increasing costs 3.5 percent annually and the SC hopes that congregations, through the efforts of the Conference of Presidents, will increase their CMO by at least that amount annually, so that ministry programs and services do not need to be cut.

The support forecast, which includes CMO, bequests, grants, and gifts, shows a slight improvement over the current year as CMO is planned to grow 0.5 percent annually. In addition, lower-than-expected operating and debt retirement costs, plus the gift of a closed congregation's property are projected to increase reserves.

This overall improvement enabled the SC to approve a Ministry Financial Plan that includes a modest increase (approximately one percent) in synod support each year of the next biennium. The plan maintains the level of ministry in all areas. It provides funding for a Director of Discipleship who will oversee the Commission on Youth and Family Ministry and the Commission on Adult Discipleship. It also provides an additional Christian Giving Counselor in the second year of the biennium, a partial adoption of the recommendation from a special committee that has conducted a review of the Ministry of Christian Giving. The plan also includes a list of unfunded priorities that will be addressed if additional funds become available.

In other business, the SC:

- Adopted a number of bylaw changes that will be presented to the synod convention in July.
- Heard a presentation from Martin Luther College regarding its strategic plan and its recommendations for addressing the needs of its campus master plan.
- Reviewed the report of the Capital Projects Committee, which has been working to identify and prioritize the capital needs of the synod.
- Adopted a long-range plan for 2017-25 that will be recommended to the synod convention in July.
- Modified the spending plan to enable the Conference of Presidents to begin calling for the Director of Discipleship in April.
- Appointed Mr. Michael Brereton to the WELS Foundation Board; Mr. Seth Hansen and Mr. John Wenker to the WELS Investment Funds Board; and re-appointed Mr. Joel Luehmann to the WELS Investment Funds Board.
- Reviewed and made minor adjustments to the policies governing the Financial Stabilization Fund, unfunded priorities, and the rate of distribution from permanently restricted funds.
- Endorsed in concept the report and recommendations from the Compensation Review Committee that will be considered by the synod convention in July.

As happens at every meeting, the SC also received reports from all of the departments and entities for which it is responsible.

Unless events in the coming months dictate otherwise, the SC will not need to meet for its scheduled meeting in April.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder

Worship Conference Registration Now Open

Registration is now open for the eighth triennial National Conference on Worship Music & the Arts.

This year's conference will be held in two locations: Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis., from June 13-16 and Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., June 27-30.

Thousands of WELS members have attended worship conferences in the past to be enriched by presentations about worship, music, liturgy, and liturgical art; to experience daily worship with WELS members from around the country; to participate in choirs and musical ensembles; and to be inspired with ideas for their local congregations.

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, chair of the conference planning committee and director of the Commission on Worship, says the planning committee works to offer presentations for everyone. “To see the value of topics for laypeople who aren’t musicians,” he says, “look for presentations on worship and outreach, church renovation, strategic planning and worship enrichment, and communicating Christ in the 21st century.”

This year, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, the conference also will include special presentations examining Lutheran history with application to the present and will feature five Reformation-themed services that showcase newly commissioned texts and music from 15 composers and poets.

A special Reformation 500 grant from Thrivent Financial is making it possible to offer the second regional conference in California. This conference will include many of the same presentations and worship services as the Kenosha conference, though it will be on a slightly smaller scale.

“This is a great opportunity for those who perhaps have found distance to be a factor in not attending past conferences,” says Rev. Mark Schewe, pastor at St. Peter, Clovis, Calif., and worship coordinator for the Arizona-California District. “I think it’s good for all of us to understand our deep Lutheran roots and also the Christian freedom that we have to worship the Lord in many forms.”

The regional conference also will allow more teens and children to be involved, with an honor choir and a children’s choir being planned for each site. “The 2011 conference featured a 40-voice children’s choir for the first time,” says Gerlach. “This was so successful that the 2017 children’s choir will be even larger, up to 80 voices for the Kenosha site. This choir will model possibilities with children, serving as an inspiration for both children and other attendees.” The honor choir will give high school students the opportunity to participate in the conference as well as sing in the closing service.

Gerlach says he’s excited for the opportunity to take the conference “on the road.” “We pray it will offer more people a chance to be personally inspired and then to take ideas back home to enrich worship in their own churches.”

You can register for either conference at wels.net/worshipconference. Singers (adults, teens, and children) and instrumentalists also can sign up to participate in choirs and worship. The registration deadline for the honor choir and the children's choir is March 15, if possible, but later registrations are also welcome.

Tickets Now On Sale For The 2017 WELS Night At Miller Park

The Milwaukee Brewers are now selling tickets for the fourth annual WELS Night at Miller Park. Organize your group and plan to join us for the Milwaukee Brewers' game against the Minnesota Twins on Thurs., Aug. 10, 2017. Game time is 7:10 p.m. Mr. Steve Thiesfeldt, vice president of Martin Luther College (MLC) and former MLC baseball coach, has joyfully agreed to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

"Thousands of WELS members have enjoyed an evening of baseball, fun, and fellowship the last three times we held this event," says Mr. Lee Hitter, director of WELS Communications Services. "Since the Brewers are playing the Twins, it seemed only appropriate to highlight MLC, our college of ministerial education located in New Ulm, Minn., in the pre-game festivities."

The Brewers are again offering WELS members up to 50 percent off the price of tickets. Seating will be along the first base line and in a block for WELS members. The pricing is Field Outfield sections 106 – 109 for \$21/ticket, Loge Outfield sections 206 – 208 for \$17/ticket, or Terrace Reserved sections 409 – 412 for \$9/ticket. The ticket service fee will be waived for groups of 20 or more if you contact Chris Kimball at 414-902-4520 or Chris.Kimball@brewers.com. The deadline to purchase tickets is Fri., Aug. 4, 2017.

Buy tickets online at brewers.com/wels.