

WELS NEWS

August 2018

New District Presidents For Michigan And Minnesota Districts

The last of the 12 district conventions concluded last week. Pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and lay delegates met to review reports on the work we have been doing together as a synod, to discuss plans for future synodical efforts, and to provide input from the districts for the 2019 synod convention.

Two of the districts elected new district presidents. Rev. John Seifert, who has served as the president of the Michigan District, is retiring later this summer. He has served as the Michigan District president since 1994 and was the longest serving member of the Conference of Presidents. Rev. Snowden Sims, serving at St. Paul's, Columbus, Ohio, was elected to succeed Seifert and has already begun to serve as district president. Rev. Charles Degner has served since 2008 as president of the Minnesota District and has also announced his retirement. Rev. Dennis Klatt, serving at Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn., was elected to succeed him and has also begun his work as the Minnesota District president.

We thank God for the faithful service of Seifert and Degner, and we ask for his gracious blessings on Sims and Klatt.

100th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

2018 marks the 100th anniversary of our sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). The ELS traces its history back to 1853, when the first Norwegian Synod was organized in the Midwestern United States. In 1917 the Norwegian Synod merged with two other Norwegian groups. A small group of pastors and congregations were opposed to the merger for doctrinal reasons; they met to form a new church body that was called the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. The name was later changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The ELS comprises approximately 20,000 baptized members with approximately 150 congregations. The ELS operates Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Seminary in Mankato, Minn. We join our ELS brothers and sisters in thanking God for his blessings on our sister synod.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

New WELS App Available

WELS released a brand-new version of the WELS Mobile app. There are several changes, including the name. It is now called the WELS App. The new WELS App is available at <https://wels.app>. It can no longer be found in the Apple, Google, or Amazon app stores; those versions are being retired in July.

The WELS App offers a quick and easy way to get wels.net-based devotions, news, and synod information from your mobile device. Daily devotions, Bible readings, weekly worship helps, military and teen devotions are just a sampling of the Bible-based content available for your regular spiritual growth and encouragement. Also included are call reports, WELS *Yearbook* data, videos, and wels.net Q&A content.

The WELS App is mobile friendly (it's developed to work on smart phones and tablets) but is technically called a "progressive web app" or PWA. PWAs provide all the features of a traditional app but can be updated more frequently and offer a similar experience on any device. They get progressively better as devices (and their web browsers) get more capabilities. New features in the WELS App include favoring, sharing, and expanded content. More new features are in the works, including bookmarks; notifications when new devotions, news, or call reports are available; user configurable text size; offline access to devotional and Yearbook content; and availability as an app in the Windows Store.

There were two major reasons to offer this new version:

The synod has limited technical resources to maintain mobile applications that are offered in the traditional Apple/Google app stores. It requires deep technical knowledge of both platforms and testing on many, many different devices. Maintaining only one app will allow WELS to push out new features much more quickly.

The new app can run safely and consistently on many more devices/platforms. Because it is simply a website, it can run on older and newer devices and systems (Amazon, Apple, Google, etc.). This will allow more people to take advantage of great Bible-based content.

Video tutorials are available. One of the more important features demonstrated in these videos is how to add the app to your device's home screen. View the videos at <https://wels.app/training-videos>. Watch for more videos as features are added to the app. Thanks for giving the WELS App a try and telling others about it. Enjoy the experience and the beautiful messages it carries. Remember to simply visit <https://wels.app> on your mobile device.

Update On An Amazing Opportunity In Vietnam

The Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC), a Christian church body in Vietnam that had been without trained pastors for 50 years, has become an unexpected and amazing opportunity for the spread of the gospel. In 2013, leaders of the HFC heard a grace-filled sermon from WELS Pastor Bounkeo Lor over the Internet. They were intrigued and invited Rev. Lor to come to Vietnam to train church leaders. The pastors of the HFC recognized that, for the first time, they were learning biblical truth and the true meaning of the gospel. They asked for more training, wanting their church body to be fully instructed in Lutheran doctrine. Rev. Lor, who now serves as the Hmong Asia Ministry coordinator, has made repeated trips to Vietnam in the years since, training over 60 leaders of the HFC.

That was amazing enough. Since instruction began, the HFC has grown from 65,000 to 100,000 members. And even more amazing, the communist government of Vietnam has expressed its approval and support for this training. One government official has commented that, of all the Christian churches working in Vietnam, WELS is the only one that is teaching what the Bible says. The government has invited our synod to construct a building that can serve as the center for this expanded training. "WELS is being given a priority that other [foreign] church bodies don't have," says Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. "It's an unprecedented, unique door that God is opening up for us."

Building a new facility will allow the HFC more freedom to schedule training for its leaders. It will give students, who live mainly in rural areas far from Hanoi, a place to stay when attending classes. And it will provide worship space for local Hmong to attend services.

Representatives of the Board for World Missions are working diligently to iron out the details of the property acquisition and the construction of the training center. While we recognize that there is risk in making this commitment, there is full agreement that this is a God-given opportunity that should be seized. Learn more about opportunities in Vietnam and how you can support the effort at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.

WELS Youth Rally Wraps Up

From June 26-29, Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, hosted the WELS International Youth Rally.

Approximately 2,100 WELS teens and youth leaders gathered for worship, learning, and fellowship under the theme "Never Alone." This theme was based on the message of Matthew 28:20: "And

surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Attendees were assured that God is ever-present in their lives and that they are not isolated in their belief.

The teens and leaders alike were encouraged and entertained by the events of the rally.

Sophia Busse, Trinity, Waukesha, Wis., remarked, “It’s been really incredible. I’ve never been with so many people who share the same faith.” This was Busse’s first time attending the rally, and she called it a “really cool experience.”

Tabitha Vannieuwenhoven, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., enjoyed discussing topics of faith with new people at the rally. “I loved all the workshops and hearing everybody else’s point of view on stuff that my friends and I talk about.”

Youth Leader David Denninger, Redeemer, Maple Grove, Minn., gathered a great deal of knowledge from other leaders to take back to his home congregation, “It’s eye-opening, and you know you’re not alone. There are resources out there, and they’re plentiful. People are giving you ideas about what you can do, and you can do it in your church no matter what the size.”

Rev. Donn Dobberstein was installed as the director of discipleship for WELS’ Congregational Services on the final day of the rally. Affirming the mission of the event, he shared a story he heard from a Florida pastor about his group of teens: “One of them was a teen girl who had just been baptized six months ago. To be able to see this event through her eyes—the eyes of someone who is new to the faith—and then to experience it on a large scale with youth from all over the nation . . . to me, that is what the event means: To let the kids know, like the rally theme says, ‘You are never alone.’”

Rev. John Boggs, a member of the rally planning committee and chairman for the WELS Commission on Discipleship, hopes that the event has a lasting impact on the attitudes of all the WELS teens who were in attendance. “It’s to give them—even if it’s just for a few days—an opportunity to celebrate the fact that their God knows who they are, their God deeply loves them, and he has put people in their lives who want to build them up instead of tear them down,” says Boggs, pastor at Divine Savior, West Palm Beach, Fla. “That’s hopefully something they’ll take with them throughout their lives at this critical time.”

The rally was organized by the WELS Commission on Discipleship. View photos from the rally on Flickr.

View WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder’s welcome to the attendees.