

# **WELS NEWS**

**December, 2015**

## **Conference Of Presidents October Meeting Highlights**

The WELS Conference of Presidents (COP) met at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis., Oct 12-15. At the meeting, the COP:

- Reappointed Rev. Earle Treptow to serve as a COP representative on the Synodical Council.
- Reaffirmed that those who have teaching or administrative responsibilities in early childhood programs should be called, not hired, and that they should be members of WELS or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.
- Endorsed a statement developed by The Lutheran Home Association affirming our synod's position against physician-assisted suicide.
- Discussed ways to better prepare delegates for district and synod conventions.
- Extended a divine call to Rev. Kevin Hundley to serve as a Christian giving counselor and to Mr. Ken Dierks to serve as a semi-retired Christian giving counselor.
- Resolved to encourage congregations to participate in the WELS VE-BA program for health insurance for their workers and commended WELS Benefit Plans for keeping premium increases to a minimum (4%).
- Authorized Home and World Missions to work with the Ministry of Christian Giving to promote missions among individual donors in 2016-17.
- Directed district constitution committees not to approve congregational constitutions that do not provide for at least an annual voters' meeting.
- Asked the Commission on Youth and Family Ministry and the Commission on Adult Discipleship to evaluate congregational needs and to prioritize the work that each commission will carry out. A part of this discussion also will be to determine whether a single director may be able to serve both commissions.
- Approved a proposal by Martin Luther College to implement a partnership program that would encourage congregations to provide scholarship assistance to their members attending MLC.
- Planned to request a meeting with the ELS Doctrine Committee to carry out further discussions on the COP study of fellowship. The COP continues to invite Lutheran high schools to complete their studies of the issue and to forward suggestions to the COP.
- Directed the Military Services Committee to ask congregations located

near military installations to include responsibilities for serving military personnel in their calls.

Serving in Christ

President Mark Schroeder

### **Japanese Congregation Celebrates 50 Years**

For 50 years, the members of Aganai Lutheran Church in Japan have been sharing the message that their name proclaims—redemption through Jesus—in a country where it is estimated that only one percent of the people are Christian.

The congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary Oct. 12 with a special worship service, featuring a sermon delivered by Rev. Kermit Habben, who served in Japan for 41 years, 28 of which were at Aganai Lutheran Church. A potluck and slideshow followed the service.

“It meant so much for us to have a former missionary couple who had spent more than 25 years in Aganai attend our special event,” says Kaori Egawa, a member at Aganai. “We were encouraged by Pastor Habben’s sermon to renew our commitment to serve the Lord faithfully until we reach our heavenly home. We truly wish to do so in Aganai Church with the help of God.”

More than 145 people attended events throughout the day, including the three other national pastors of the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC), WELS’ sister church in Japan. “Celebrating 50 years of ministry in Japan was not just a closed event for the members but one of the biggest outreach events we ever had. It was wonderful that many people who have lost close contact responded to our invitation,” says Egawa. “God blessed us with beautiful weather that day, and it became a great chance to tell our non-Christian friends and family about our church history and share our faith in Jesus Christ.”

The congregation works hard to spread God’s Word in its community. Egawa says that includes inviting members’ friends and families to the congregation’s café for coffee and snacks as well as offering special children’s events, parenting classes, and lunch parties. The congregation also has Bible classes, Sunday school, and worship in English on Saturday nights and in Japanese on Sundays.

“The appearance of our church building has served as a good tool of outreach,” Egawa adds. “Our building stands out as an ‘authentic’ church in a quiet residential area in Higashikurume. When someone is looking for healing and hope and wanting to know who Jesus Christ is, seeing the church’s pointed roof and the cross becomes an encouragement for them to knock on our doors. I’ve often heard people say that they feel comfort just by looking at it and coming inside to see the wooden interior. As they

join our gatherings, they soon find out that it is God's Word and the people who stay faithful to the gospel that makes a true church!"

Aganai is one of six LECC congregations. The 110-member congregation mostly has been served by WELS missionaries but now has a resident Japanese pastor, one of four for this national church body. The LECC currently has 378 members and no resident missionaries. Says Egawa, "We ask you to continue to keep us in your prayers as we walk with you the narrow road to heaven."

Learn more about Aganai Lutheran Church and the LECC in the November issue of *Forward in Christ* or at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions). Or visit the congregation's website, [www.tokyoaganai.com](http://www.tokyoaganai.com). View a [slideshow from Japan](#).

### **OWLS Sets New Record For Support**

The Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) met in La Crosse, Wis., Oct. 13-15, under the theme "Lift Your Eyes to the Hills" for its annual convention. About 215 members from around the United States attended.

Rev. Mark Jeske served as keynote speaker, reminding attendees to serve the Lord as long as they have life. WELS Board of Ministerial Education Administrator Rev. Paul Prange encouraged OWLS to make connections with neighbors who were not born in this country. Mr. Steven Loehr, who works for Kwik Trip, spoke of God's role in our lives. Workshops offered opportunities to ask a lawyer questions, and to learn about the Wartburg Translation Project, mission work in Nepal, tips for using a tablet or digital reader, and prayer.

The convention was buoyed by the announcement of a new OWLS Chapter in Wausau, Wis., and growth in membership in some chapters. For the first time, OWLS awarded scholarships to two Martin Luther College students, Benjamin Haferman and Bethany Waldschmidt, on the basis of service. During the course of the convention, an "Improve and Grow Committee" organized to position OWLS to welcome a new generation of seniors and unite in service projects locally and nationally.

For several years, OWLS has generously supported the WELS European Civilian chaplaincy program, which serves military personnel and WELS civilians in Europe. This year its offering, \$59,989.89, set a new record, a seven percent increase over the previous year.

Rev. Jim Behringer, director of the Commission on Special Ministries, says, "Many OWLS members have been our church's committed servants and stewards. They have the future of the church at heart. Many have invested their adult lives serving the Lord in local congregations and encouraging mission work and Christian education. It was especially heartening to experience their fellowship and joy in the Lord."

### **Special Reformation 500 Service Being Planned**

The synod is planning a special service in downtown Milwaukee on Oct. 31, 2017, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

“The blessings that we enjoy today—knowing God’s grace and knowing the true God through the Word he has spoken to us in the Scriptures—have come to us as a result of what God did through Martin Luther. For 500 years, the gospel message has been preached and proclaimed to us and through us. Those are blessings that we can’t help but celebrate in a special way,” says Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president.

The service will be the culmination of two continuing education opportunities for WELS called workers held at the Wisconsin Center in downtown Milwaukee on Oct. 30-31—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s annual symposium and the Wisconsin Lutheran State Teachers’ Conference, which will be inviting WELS educators nationwide to participate. The service, tentatively planned to start at 2 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2017, will be held downtown in a venue large enough to accommodate the thousands of called workers attending the conferences as well as all WELS members who are able to attend. “Although worship is taking place at the end of these called workers’ conferences, it is intended as a service of thanksgiving and celebration for all WELS members,” says Schroeder.

Choirs from WELS high schools will be invited to participate in the service. “With so many of the synod’s called workers present and choirs from the synod’s high schools, I can only imagine the closing service on Tuesday afternoon, the exact day of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation,” says Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education and part of the service planning committee.

Special gifts will fund the event. According to Prange, the plan is to offer financial help to called workers whose travel costs might exceed their usual fall conference expenses.

WELS districts and conferences also are planning celebratory events in 2017 on the weekends surrounding Reformation day. The WELS website will be updated as information becomes available.