

# **WELS NEWS**

December 2018

## **COP Holds Its Fall 2018 Meeting**

The Conference of Presidents (COP) met for its fall meeting during the first week of October. Here are some of the highlights of that meeting:

- The COP issued calls for three Christian giving counselors. Rev. Jonathan Stern was called to a part-time semi-retirement position to serve the Arizona-California District; Rev. Bryan Schwarz was called to serve in a full-time position serving the South Central and South Atlantic Districts; Rev. Thomas Mielke was called to serve in a full-time position serving the Northern Wisconsin District.
- There are 106 vacancies in parish pastor positions, seven in semi-retirement positions, two in foreign mission fields, three in professor positions, and three in other pastor-trained positions.
- The COP received a progress report from a special committee assigned to make recommendations regarding the coordination of campus worship activities and worship curriculum in our ministerial education schools.
- The Translation Review Committee submitted its final report of its review of the Christian Standard Bible. The review will be made available soon. The committee is also currently conducting a similar review of the Evangelical Heritage Version and plans to complete that review by the end of the year.
- The COP discussed the process for conducting discipline and carrying out suspension of called workers. It was agreed that the COP will review the synod's bylaws dealing with this process and recommend any necessary changes to the next synod convention.
- The COP received a report from a special committee reviewing the synod's pension plan for called workers. The COP expressed support for the recommendations, which will be presented to the Synodical Council in November.
- Aaron Bublitz was appointed to serve on the Commission on Discipleship.
- The COP established age 55 as the earliest age at which a called worker may retire. Departures from the ministry prior to age 55 will be categorized as resignations.
- The COP discussed the matter of Calvary Academy. Calvary Academy was a boarding school for troubled teens, located near Lakeland, Fla. It was a WELS-affiliated, independent, parasynodical ministry, meaning that it was a ministry carried out and supported by WELS members but was not operated by the synod or a part of the synod's ministry. Several months ago, Calvary Academy ceased operations and declared Chapter 128 bankruptcy. This means that a lawyer has been appointed by the court to liquidate the assets of Calvary and to use those assets

to pay creditors. Many WELS members had made loans to Calvary; they are now waiting to see what portion, if any, of those loans can be returned to them. It was reported to the COP that people are still sending gifts to Calvary. The COP advises that no one send additional gifts to this ministry that has been discontinued. The court has determined that any gifts received for Calvary will be forwarded to a different organization. In addition, if you have included Calvary Academy in your estate plan, the COP strongly encourages you to take steps to remove Calvary from your will.

- The COP continued its discussion on how to provide additional assistance to the presidents of the three largest districts (Northern Wisconsin, Southeastern Wisconsin, and Western Wisconsin). A likely solution will be to make greater use of the district vice presidents in the work normally done by the district president.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

### **Synodical Council Holds Fall 2018 Meeting**

The Synodical Council (SC) held its fall meeting on Friday and Saturday of last week. Here are some of the highlights:

- Larry Schlomer, administrator of the Board for World Missions, provided an overview of the work currently being done in our mission fields around the world, with an emphasis on new opportunities that are presenting themselves. A new opportunity to provide theological training to pastors of the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam will be given high priority.
- A special committee reviewing the WELS Pension Plan presented its recommendations to the SC. The SC asked the committee to study additional options and hopes a pension plan design will be prepared for consideration by the 2020 district conventions and ready for action at the 2021 synod convention.
- Scott Neitzel was appointed to the WELS Foundation Board of Directors.
- The Church Extension Fund (CEF) reported healthy net asset, liquidity, and cash flow numbers. Overall loan volume has been lighter than normal this year, but it is picking up in recent months. Total investments in the CEF have increased. Because of healthy net asset levels, the CEF was able to provide a special grant of \$1 million to Home Missions. The WELS Foundation also reported strong financial results, enabling a transfer of its unrestricted net assets to support WELS ministries.
- Communications Services and Northwestern Publishing House are studying how to boost readership of *Forward in Christ* magazine as well as increase the number of subscriptions.
- The Ministry of Christian Giving, with the approval of the Conference of Presidents and in coordination with WELS World Missions, is conducting a special offering from December through June to build and operate a theological training center for Hmong outreach in Vietnam. Rev. Kurt

Lueneburg also outlined the joint plans of Martin Luther College, the Conference of Presidents, and Ministry of Christian Giving to increase recruitment of future called workers, to provide additional financial assistance to those training for ministry at MLC, and to build a new dormitory at the college. This "Equipping Christian Witnesses" effort will be launched at the 2019 synod convention.

- Operating fund expenses for the fiscal year that ended June 30 were \$700,000 less than planned due to unfilled positions and lower than planned expenses in the president's areas, technology, facilities, and finance, as well as lower health care costs.
- Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) totaled \$21.2 million for the last fiscal year, which was \$102,000 less than planned. Increased CMO for the coming year will be vital to ensure that ministries can be maintained at their current levels.
- The Financial Stabilization Fund (FSF) ended the year with a balance of \$14.6 million. In view of that balance, the SC had previously approved the expenditure of \$400,000 toward items on the unfunded priority list adopted by the 2017 convention. Spending projections for the current year and the next biennium drop the balance more than \$2 million below the \$10 million minimum target for the FSF. In February, the SC will consider changes to spending levels to ensure that the balance in the FSF is maintained at a healthy level.
- A preliminary Ministry Financial Plan (budget) was reviewed by the SC; a final plan will be adopted in February or April and brought as a recommendation to the 2019 synod convention.
- All four synodical schools experienced increases in their net assets due to increased enrollments, increased gifts, correction of accounting errors, and lower than expected expenses. A budgetary shortfall at Michigan Lutheran Seminary (due primarily to lower than planned enrollment and lower than planned gifts from the Tomorrow's Ministry Begins Here campaign) was addressed by reallocating funds within the special funds and the operating budget of the Board of Ministerial Education. The SC also approved the replacement of bleachers at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, to be funded by the MLS Foundation; authorized Luther Preparatory School to do preliminary planning for a possible music auditorium; and a multi-year project for the replacement of HVAC controllers at MLC.
- WELS' independent auditors issued an unmodified or clean opinion, the best possible, on WELS Consolidated Financial Statements for the 2017-18 fiscal year.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

### **Volunteers Begin Cleanup After Hurricane Michael**

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is now coordinating volunteers to help with cleanup and rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Michael. Efforts are

primarily focused on Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla., which was hit directly by the storm. Amazing Grace's church and parsonage experienced extensive damage, as did homes of several members and many in the community.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief quickly mobilized two of its relief trailers after Hurricane Michael struck the Panama City area and began coordinating volunteers to help with the cleanup project, including a group of 10 students from Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn. "These students had so much energy and enthusiasm," says Elizabeth Zambo of Christian Aid and Relief. "They gutted the church and parsonage that had been flooded, ripping out drywall and insulation. It was messy work, but they never complained."

"It was an eye-opening experience," says Hailey Stade, a sophomore at MLC and a member of Immanuel, Farmington, Wis. "I had no idea what to expect until we crossed the bridge to Panama City. Buildings were flattened. Every tree you saw was on the ground or bent in half. Power lines were all over the sides of streets and sidewalks. Large boats were tipped to their side in the water, and a building was considered lucky if it even had some of its roof intact."

"This experience was definitely life changing," notes Becky Pruss, a junior at MLC and a member at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis. "When people who have lost so much still greet you with a smile and genuine conversation, it puts everything in perspective. Our God is definitely greater than the storms that may come our way in life. It really showed me that every day is an opportunity to live your faith."

Zambo notes that volunteers will continue to be needed for months as work progresses on the church, parsonage, six to eight members' homes, and homes of those in the community. Amazing Grace is currently worshipping at a nearby Christian camp facility, and its vacancy pastor, Rev. Jerome Enderle, and his wife are living in rented housing provided by Christian Aid and Relief.

Christian Aid and Relief has provided \$108,000 toward this relief effort to this point, and more grant requests are expected. Monies distributed have been allocated for items such as supplies, building materials, gift cards, and volunteer expenses.

"The members of Amazing Grace have been overwhelmed by the love and support of their Christian brothers and sisters around WELS," says Enderle. "This has served as an encouraging reminder that our small flock of believers is a part of a much larger family. The support and assistance of Christian Aid and Relief and the outpouring of gifts from people too numerous to begin to name cause us to thank and praise our Savior God. Truly he is the God of Amazing Grace."

Christian Aid and Relief is partnering with Kingdom Workers' Builders for Christ as the rebuilding process begins. Builders for Christ provides volunteers with building skills to serve alongside Christian Aid and Relief volunteers. To apply to serve as a volunteer to help with cleanup and relief work through WELS Christian Aid and Relief, visit [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief) and fill out the volunteer form.