

WELS NEWS **February 2017**

Conference Highlights Multi-Site Strategy

A recent conference highlighted a rising strategy for expanding mission work—multi-site ministry, in which a congregation carries out gospel ministry at more than one physical location.

“More and more congregations as they’re looking to find new places and reach more people with the gospel are considering a multi-site ministry as a viable option,” says Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of the Board for Home Missions. “It allows them to establish a new spot and reach new communities that otherwise they wouldn’t think of doing.”

A growing number of WELS congregations are using this approach to expand their gospel outreach, and five of the eight new mission starts authorized by Home Missions in 2016 are multi-site ministries.

Divine Peace in Garland, Texas, was one of those congregations that received funding. Rev. John Hering, pastor at Divine Peace, says that three years ago the congregation noticed a community across the lake (about 20 minutes away) growing by 160 new families a month. Six families in the congregation already lived in that area. “We saw the opportunity,” says Hering. “We started dreaming and thinking, but we really didn’t know what it would look like.”

When the 180-member congregation applied for funding to call a second pastor, it was just learning about multi-site ministries. Gunnar Ledermann, a 2016 graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., was assigned to serve as Divine Peace’s second pastor and help establish its second site.

Right away Ledermann noticed the benefits of having one congregation with multiple sites, including built-in congregational leadership, structure, volunteers, and shared resources. “It allowed me to come in and not have to worry about these things because they were already taken care of,” he says. “It has freed me up to meet people and allowed both of us to do more evangelism work at both locations because we are one congregation.”

Yet Divine Peace still had questions. “We had a ministry plan in place and we have been laying groundwork, but it was the multi-site conference that helped us connect all the dots,” says Hering. Ten people from that congregation attended the WELS Multi-Site Conference, held Nov. 14–16 at Grace, a multi-site congregation with four locations in Benson, Sahuarita, Tucson, and Vail, Arizona. The conference was made possible by an Antioch II grant.

Conference workshop topics focused on key multi-site components including communication, staffing, volunteers, budget and finances, merging two or more congregations, and organizational structure. Attendees also had a chance to hear firsthand from others at all different stages in multi-site ministry. “We didn’t want information to come from a book,” says Rev. Daron Lindemann, chairman of the conference planning committee and pastor at Holy Word, a multi-site church in Austin and Pflugerville, Texas. “[Attendees] had a chance

to rub elbows with about 50 churches represented by 144 people and hear the stories of multi-site churches.”

The conference also gave attendees time to process what they’ve learned and start making plans about how to incorporate it into their ministries. “We wanted to help people clarify and crystallize what [multi-site ministry] involves so that they can go into it thoughtfully,” says Lindemann.

Hering says the conference answered his congregation’s questions and offered different suggestions of ways to minister to multiple locations as one congregation. “We’re trying to remain appropriately flexible in both locations while at the same time make use of the gifts people have on both campuses,” says Hering. “It helps the congregation stay united in their vision, seeing that they are doing outreach as a whole rather than dividing up between locations.”

Though Divine Peace has been having worship services in Rockwall since March, it held its grand opening for the community Dec. 4.

According to Uhlhorn, while establishing multi-site ministries is popular right now, it is not replacing the traditional new starts authorized by Home Missions. He does, however, see advantages. “It’s a new mission, but it’s also got some real live partners that are working every day together to spread the gospel in new places.”

For more information about multi-site ministry, contact conference planning committee members, Rev. Nathan Strutz, pastorstrutz@rlcverona.com, or Rev. Peter Kruschel, peter.kruschel@wels.net. Learn more about home mission opportunities at wels.net/missions.

Home Mission Connections Lead To World Mission Opportunities

“The Lord is opening some pretty big doors around the world,” says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of Home Missions.

Why is the home mission administrator talking about world mission opportunities? Because the two areas are coming together in an exciting way. “When leaders in the late 1980s and 1990s began working with cross-cultural ministries, little did they know that what we would do in the United States would have impact and ramifications around the world,” says Free.

When men like Rev. Peter Bur, a South Sudanese refugee who settled in Omaha, Neb.; student Matthew Cephas, a Liberian in St. Paul, Minn.; and Rev. Bounkeo Lor, a Hmong pastor in Kansas City, Kan., hear and learn confessional Lutheran teachings, they want to share it—and not just with their neighbors next door. “What drives us so much overseas are Pastoral Studies Institute graduates who want to go back home,” says Prof. E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI).

This fall, PSI team members, who work to train, mentor, and equip confessional Lutherans around the world, visited Africa and Asia to further explore new mission opportunities and how best to serve the people in these areas.

Kenya

Bur and Sorum have made multiple trips to Ethiopia and Kenya to train South Sudanese pastors and spiritual leaders who are serving South Sudanese refugees. “We are training trainers to train trainers,” says Sorum. In 2015, they distributed copies of Bur’s translation of a simplified version of the Small Catechism, complete with artwork by Rev. Terry Schultz, a member of the WELS Multi-Language Publications team.

This fall, Sorum, Bur, and Schultz spent three weeks in Nairobi, Kenya, furthering the training of men living in refugee camps in Kakuma, Kenya.

But are these men really taking what they learned to heart? As Sorum puts it, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

Or in the worn-out catechism.

On this trip, Sorum asked the group how they used the catechisms they received in 2015. James Machar, who leads a flourishing church in what Sorum calls “one of the most rugged spots to try to even survive let alone start a church,” said, “I handed out 150 certificates of completion to the people who completed every lesson in the catechism course.”

Then Sorum saw the catechism of Evangelist Michael, one of the men who had been trained by Machar. He had traveled three days to continue his training in Nairobi. His catechism was worn out.

“I asked him, ‘Do you have it memorized?’” says Sorum. “He said, ‘Almost.’”

Sorum continues, “These people are starving not only literally but also spiritually for a lack of resources. They come to us for materials and training and then they go home and do incredible things with them in the most difficult of circumstances.”

Liberia

Sorum also traveled to Liberia with Rev. Robert Wendland, a missionary in Malawi, to see what the opportunities were for ongoing training and for working with the Confessional Lutheran Church of Liberia. Connections had been made through PSI Bible Institute graduate Isaac David and Rev. Matthew Vogt of Las Vegas, Nev., and WELS pastors had already traveled to Liberia to start training congregational leaders.

“We talked to many congregations and met stunning leaders and committed men,” says Sorum. “In one village they said I was the first American to set foot in their church. It was one of the most intensely foreign feelings I ever had. But they are a warm and friendly people, who are anxious and eager to become more Lutheran.”

Vietnam

Jon Bare in Vietnam

In November, Rev. Jon Bare, international recruitment director, and Sorum traveled to Vietnam with Rev. Bounkeo Lor and Evangelist Vicar Hue Thao to meet with 60 leaders of the Hmong Christian Fellowship, a church body with 600 pastors and more than 70,000 members. These men were contacts made through Lor, who has been traveling to Vietnam for the past

three years to lead similar workshops.

Besides conducting training classes in Hanoi, they traveled to several village churches in the mountains. Bare, who has visited Vietnam on vacation, says, "You look at it in a completely different way than just seeing it as a tourist. They want our training, and their lives have been changed by the gospel message of Jesus. It's just a beautiful thing to be able to experience that."

Sorum says the church has grown since the leaders have been teaching the law and gospel lessons they learned from Lor, adding 2,400 members and 40 churches in the last six months. "It was one of the most inspiring, uplifting trips I've ever made," he says.

Says Free, "Who would have thought a step Home Missions took many years ago to reach more cultures in the U.S. would lead to the opportunities we have today? These blessings are just another encouragement that we need to remain faithful in sowing the seed and then watch in amazement as God blesses the sharing of the gospel where and when he wills."

Learn more about these opportunities at wels.net/missions.

Winter 2017 Interactive Faith Announced

The next Interactive Faith online Bible study will begin Wed., Feb. 1. The sessions will be offered live twice every Wednesday in February at 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. (central).

The study will be led by Rev. Randy Hunter from St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis. Hunter, who has spent several years touring the country leading marriage enrichment workshops for WELS members, will be discussing "Mysterious Marriage," a study on building a Christian marriage.

"This study is for couples who want to build their marriage on the gospel of Jesus. Marriage isn't a sacrament like Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but it is a profoundly holy thing. The gospel of Jesus helps us understand and practice marriage. Marriage helps us understand and appreciate the gospel," says Hunter. "Marriage matters. It matters to our nation, to our communities, our children, our churches, and our Lord. Your marriage is part of your testimony about God's promises to us."

Many congregations gather as a group for the study; other WELS members connect as small groups or individuals. The studies are designed to have 10 to 15 minutes of lecture by the instructor, followed by 5 to 10 minutes for congregations to discuss a question or two or do further study. Participants can interact with the instructor via a chat box on the live stream. To join the study, visit wels.net/interactivefaith.