

WELS NEWS

January 2018

Synodical Council Meeting Summary

The Synodical Council (SC) held its fall meeting Nov. 10-11 at the Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis. Highlights from that meeting include the following:

- Jon Hein, coordinator for Congregational Services, attended his first meeting as an advisory member of the SC. He presented a summary of the demographic challenges facing our synod and outlined plans being made to help congregations address those challenges. Congregations will be provided with resources as they address ministry to millennials, work to reduce the number of backdoor losses, and emphasize every-member evangelism in order to increase the number of adult confirmations. Hein also outlined plans to provide guidelines to congregations considering mergers as a means to improve their ministries.
- The SC reviewed the synod's financial results from the fiscal year that ended on June 30. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) were slightly better than planned. Several areas of ministry underspent their budgets due to vacancies and cost-cutting efforts. All four synodical schools ended the year in a stronger than expected position due to gifts and investment results greater than planned. The Financial Stabilization Fund ended the year at its highest level ever. If CMO performance by the end of year remains strong and if CMO subscriptions in January are as planned, there is the possibility that at its February meeting the SC may be able to approve some of the projects in the "Unfunded Priority List." We thank God for all of these blessings.
- The SC thanked Martin Luther College for developing a policy outlining how its unrestricted net assets will be utilized.
- The SC approved the appointment of a special committee to review the options available to the synod in providing retirement benefits to its called workers.
- Director of Communications Mr. Lee Hitter reported that there were nearly 1,000 screenings of the film *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy* hosted by WELS and ELS congregations. The film is available from NPH. The PBS version of the film (*Martin Luther: The Idea that Changed the World*) will be available on Netflix beginning in January.

- The SC made minor changes to the “Unfunded Priorities List.” One or more items on this list could be funded in February. The first five on the list are:
 - ◊ Publication Coordinating Commission (\$50,000 for publishing theological works)
 - ◊ MLC tuition reduction or financial assistance (\$150,000)
 - ◊ Additional home mission start (\$200,000)
 - ◊ Ministry of Christian Giving counselor one year earlier than planned (\$100,000)
 - ◊ Training support for national mission workers in Ethiopia and Sudan (\$50,000)
- World Missions reported that it will begin a new program called “Mission Journeys,” providing opportunities for lay volunteers to participate in short-term mission work.

These are only some of the matters discussed and decided by the SC. The blessings of God on our synod continue to be poured out in ways that are more than we could ask or imagine. As we join together as families and congregations for the upcoming holiday, we add our specific thanks to God that he continues to bless us with the truth of his gospel and with the opportunities to share that message around the world.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Grants Encourage Pastor-Layperson Partnership

Grow in Grace, the institute for pastoral growth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., has awarded \$500 grants to two congregations to encourage pastors and lay leaders to grow together in carrying out the gospel ministry entrusted to them.

Since 2014, a retired pastor and his wife have provided funding and the direction for these grants.

More than 20 congregations offered proposals this year; the grants were given to Lamb of God, Columbus, Ohio, and Peace, Aiken, S.C.

Lamb of God is holding a facilitated retreat for council members and other key members of the congregation. Its proposal reads, “The main focus will be to strongly define our goals and mission for the ministry we have before us; to refocus our efforts to where our strengths and abilities are most productive and our workers feel most useful; and to increase the open honest communication that will be necessary to be willing workers in the harvest.”

Peace is starting a leadership program for its congregation. The proposal states, "We have three levels of discipleship here. Peace 101 is our membership course. Peace Academy is regular and ongoing doctrinal study. And Peace Lutheran Institute is our inaugural program to raise up the next group of leaders to work, minister, and lead in our church. This year we are piloting the program to see what works best and grow it into a sustainable ministry that year in and year out is producing leaders at Peace."

Past recipients even have looked beyond their own congregation. Zion, Akaska, S.D., received a grant in 2014 to hold a councilmen's retreat for its entire circuit.

Prof. Richard Gurgel, director of Grow in Grace, says these grants connect well with the institute's purpose to help pastors grow in their faith and in their callings as pastors, husbands, and fathers. "No doubt, vital to that growth is that the pastor doesn't have the sense that he's at this alone," he says. "It's encouraging congregations to share the joys and the challenges of ministry and not simply to look to the pastor to take care of everything."

Gurgel says Grow in Grace is also hard at work preparing for the next Celebration of Ministry retreats, being held April 18-20, 2018, in San Antonio, Texas. Pastors and wives celebrating their 3-, 10-, 25-, and—new this year—35-year anniversary in the ministry will gather to reflect on these key ministry milestones, to be encouraged in their faith, and to prepare for the years ahead.

Learn more about Grow in Grace at wls.wels.net/grow-in-grace.

Tuition Grants For American Sign Language Class

Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., is offering "American Sign Language and Introduction to Deaf Culture" (ASL 8001), an online, three-credit course, from Jan. 3 to May 4, 2018. The course provides the basic foundation of American Sign Language through an overview of deaf culture and an introduction to the signing of finger spelling and basic vocabulary with beginner-level conversations. The instructor is Matthew Buchholz, a member of the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Here is what previous students have said:

"I never expected to receive so much from this experience. . . . I have a deeper understanding of the culture, needs, and resources available to the deaf and hard of hearing community and a whole bunch of signs in my arsenal." – Trisha

"I already have oodles and oodles of ideas on how I can revamp some of my lesson plans for next year to include sign language." – Sandy

"Thank you also for making this course available and affordable. Beginning to learn ASL has been a wonderful challenge, but for me, learning about deaf culture in this course has been invaluable. I hope that this course is made available in the future so that more people can have a greater understanding of the deaf and hard of hearing." – Cori

A limited number of \$450 grants toward tuition are available upon request and will be paid upon the completion of the course. The deadline to register is Dec. 13. Learn more at mlc-wels.edu/continuing-education/registration. A poster to promote the class can be downloaded from the Special Ministries Resource Center at csm.welsrc.net/mission-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing.