

WELS NEWS

July 2015

Call Days Underline The Need For Recruitment

Call day at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., saw 86 candidates assigned to their field of ministry. All 2015 graduates available to go anywhere were assigned, but 40 requests for graduates were not able to be filled. A week later at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., 32 graduates and about a dozen previous graduates received assignments, but approximately a dozen requests from congregations seeking a graduate were not able to be filled.

This underlines two important truths: First, we thank God for the blessings of willing and well-trained workers to send into his harvest field. We thank all who work diligently to train our future workers at our Ministerial Education schools. And we are thankful for the generous support of the people of our synod who recognize the importance of preparing the next generation of called workers.

But the second truth is equally important. The number of congregations requesting pastors or teachers is larger than it has been in some time. The need for teachers continues to grow, and with the establishment of new home missions coupled with increasing retirements of “baby-boom” pastors, the need for pastoral candidates is also clear. The congregational vacancy rate for pastors has grown in recent years to about seven percent. This vacancy level is still healthy and is currently not a concern. But we don’t want to see that number continue to grow.

Increasing needs in our schools and smaller pastor-track class sizes at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary should be a continuing reminder that recruitment of future pastors and teachers remains an important priority. Parents and grandparents, pastors and teachers, and congregational members are on the front lines of this important task. Whether it is speaking a word of encouragement to a young person, establishing a financial assistance program in your congregation, or facilitating visits to school campuses, each one of us can help to address the need for workers who will proclaim the saving gospel in the years to come.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Seminary Graduation In Nigeria

Nine men graduated from Christ the King Lutheran Seminary near Abak, Nigeria, on March 14. The men were from WELS' two sister

synods in Nigeria—seven from All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria and two from Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Rev. Joel Jaeger, a visiting professor; Rev. John Holtz, a missionary from Malawi; and Rev. Douglas Weiser, missionary to Nigeria, participated in the service.

This is the fourth graduating class from Christ the King Lutheran Seminary; the last class graduated in 2008.

The new pastors completed five years of formal studies—two in the preseminary and three in the seminary—as well as several years of service in congregations. “Men from both Nigerian synods study together in both preseminary and seminary,” says Weiser. “For the All Saints students that means living far from home and leaving their families behind for months at a time.” Nigerian pastors and professional school teachers teach courses for the preseminary years, while Weiser, two Christ the King pastors, and 16 volunteer WELS pastors lead the seminary courses.

Jaeger, pastor at Christ, Milwaukee, Wis., has taught seminary courses in Nigeria four different times, most recently from Feb. 19–March 16. “I never would have imagined that I would be involved in training pastors, but I think this system works really well,” says Jaeger. “Their parish ministry is so different in so many ways, and yet it's exactly the same because it's preaching law and gospel, it's applying God's Word to souls that are hurting, and it's helping people see the joy in Christ's salvation. To be part of that process, to have the Holy Spirit use us to get [students] to that point, is really special.”

Weiser says that the next round of students will begin preseminary classes in July 2016.

For the first time, All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria will run its own preseminary, allowing All Saints students to be closer to home for the first two years of their training. A grant from WELS World Missions allowed All Saints to construct a building to use for these classes as well as for an administrative office for the synod. All the students then will complete their studies at Christ the King Lutheran Seminary. “By joining theological students for seminary training, the two synods enhance their fellowship in God's Word and a sense of unity among their pastors,” says Weiser.

Weiser serves part-time as a non-resident missionary to WELS' two sister synods in Nigeria. He works closely with 26 national pastors who serve 56 congregations/preaching stations and 5,203 members.

Learn more about the graduation, including the trials the students went through over the years, in a [recent blog](#) by Missionary Holtz. Learn more about our sister synods in Nigeria at www.wels.net/missions.

PSI Students Graduate Seminary

This week, two men will travel from their homes in Nebraska and

Arizona to graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. These men are receiving degrees through the seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI), which guides non-traditional students through their pre-seminary and seminary training.

Kirk Massey grew up near East Fork, Ariz., and attended East Fork Lutheran School for both grade school and high school. "I had missionary kid friends who went to New Ulm, and pastors and teachers were my role models, but I never thought about being a pastor," he says. After working in different jobs, he eventually began working with youth group and family ministry. In 2000, Massey and his wife, Sheree, became dorm parents at East Fork High School. That's when he began taking classes through the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS). "It was the best thing that happened to me: Getting into God's Word with the other people," he says. "The Holy Spirit really worked."

In 2011, Rev. Dan Rautenberg encouraged Massey to be a pastor; he prayed about it and jumped in. Taking advantage of the flexibility that PSI offers, Rautenberg and Professor Allen Sorum, PSI director, laid out a course plan that built on the ACTS program.

"Kirk's gifts, character, family life, service record, and zeal make him the perfect candidate for the special program arranged for him," says Sorum.

Peter Bur, originally from South Sudan, is a member at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb., where he has been worshiping since 2010. Working with Rev. Michael Ewart, Bur—who was already serving as a spiritual leader for Sudanese immigrants—began taking courses through PSI to deepen his theological training. Throughout his training, he has served other South Sudanese people throughout North America by connecting them to their local WELS congregations and pastors. In addition, last October he traveled with another South Sudanese man, Simon Duoth, and Sorum to Gambella, Ethiopia, studying how WELS might be able to serve the South Sudanese refugees there. "Peter's service is impeccable beyond words. This man's mission zeal and pastoral heart are inspiring," says Sorum. "We will be blessed to have this man serving with us as a WELS pastor."

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's graduation and call services will be streamed online, beginning tonight, May 19 at 7 p.m. (central), with the vicar assignment service. To find out more, visit www.wls.wels.net.

Ten Years At Asia Lutheran Seminary

Asia Lutheran Seminary (ALS) in Hong Kong celebrated its tenth anniversary during the month of May. Special events included a banquet dinner, an anniversary worship service, and a lecture series by ALS' former president, Dr. John Lawrenz.

"These three nights of lectures not only showed the Christ-centered nature of the Old Testament to our students and visitors but were

excellent examples of the Christ-centered nature of Asia Lutheran Seminary and all of its teaching,” says Dr. Glen Thompson, one of the four full-time ALS professors.

Since 2009, ALS has graduated 27 people with theological degrees, with all but two trained to serve as full-time workers in East Asia. More than 20 visiting professors from the United States have helped with the training. The seminary also provides the opportunity to help laypeople grow in their knowledge of their Savior and confessional Lutheranism. Seventy-five percent of the 100 current students will remain laypeople in their congregations, “creating a proper theological leaven in their church body as teachers and leaders,” says Dr. Steve Witte, ALS president.

In addition, a satellite seminary has started in East Asia. Six students graduated with bachelor of theology degrees in November 2014. Another group of six men from various metropolises throughout East Asia will start training this year.

The Translation Working Group, which translates, produces, and distributes confessional Lutheran materials in Chinese, also is based at Asia Lutheran Seminary.

“Through the workers ALS has trained, ALS has given legs to our vision of establishing Lutheran churches in East Asia,” says Field Coordinator Rob Siirila. “God has used ALS instruction to deepen the theological roots of our sister church in Hong Kong. Finally, by wisely using the resources given by God through WELS, ALS is firmly positioned to be a clear voice for evangelical Lutheran theology in Asia!”

Learn more about ALS at www.wels.net/missions. You can also view and download a PowerPoint presentation on ALS and our sister church in Hong Kong, South Asian Lutheran