

WELS NEWS

June 2016

Eight New Home Missions Approved

The Board for Home Missions authorized eight new mission starts, three ministry enhancements, and one relocation during a meeting on April 15.

“Planting eight new churches is a tremendous blessing,” says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of the Board for Home Missions. “These are eight new locations where the gospel will be proclaimed.”

The new ministries that will now be supported include new starts in Lehi, Utah; Coeur d’Alene, Idaho; Rockwall, Texas; Fredericksburg, Va.; Atlanta, Ga.; Victoria, Texas; Meridian, Idaho; and Stevens Point, Wis. Five of these ministries will be second sites for established congregations.

Home Missions will also support ministry enhancement at three congregations—Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.; Abiding Grace, Henry-Newton County, Ga.; and Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla. These existing congregations will receive funds from Home Missions to support projects that will allow the congregations to reach more people with the gospel.

In addition, Home Missions will help Peace, Holiday, Fla., with some transition costs as it moves to Trinity, Fla. This established congregation is already seeing God’s blessing on the new location. Twenty-five adults have been confirmed at Peace during the past 18 months.

We thank God for the opportunities to expand our work in Home Missions and for providing the resources to carry it out.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Grief Counseling In Nepal

Two therapists from WLCFS—Christian Family Solutions traveled to Nepal in February to conduct a grief workshop for survivors of two

major earthquakes that hit Nepal in April and May of 2015. More than one hundred Christians from the Dhading District traveled 20 hours on a bus to the Scripture Learning Center to receive comfort from God's Word as well as practical tips on how to cope after loss.

"It was a perfect balance," says the friendly counselor to Nepal. "We shared deep, meaningful, life-related, comforting Bible passages and truths from Job and from the life of Jesus. And then we did more lighthearted activities, and they laughed and laughed and laughed."

Although the earthquakes happened almost a year earlier, the friendly counselor shares that many attendees are still grieving after losing so much in the earthquakes—their homes, their churches, their possessions, their feeling of safety, even family members' lives. Thirty-nine members in our fellowship died, and nine churches were destroyed. Many are still living in makeshift homes while waiting to see if the government is going to relocate them.

"There still is a huge amount of loss, and people are living this on a day-to-day basis," says Mrs. Anita Smith, one of the therapists. "To come to a safe place [for the workshop] where they know that they will be safe, they will have a place to sleep, they will be warm, and they will be fed—that alone is a comfort for them."

She continues, "So many people when they go through a trauma are on hyper alert. My goal was to get them to relax, calm down, and to process the grief."

The therapists used activities such as deep breathing exercises and games with balloons (many had never seen a balloon before) to get attendees to relax and work together. They also had attendees draw pictures of their grief and share their pictures and stories with each other.

"So many women wanted to talk to me, but I didn't know the language and there wasn't always a translator available," says Smith. "I would just listen and nod my head and smile and give them a hug. That was enough. They needed me to listen, and they needed me to pray for them."

While the workshop was meant to help heal, strengthen, and comfort attendees, it was also to instruct them on how to reach out and comfort their friends and neighbors who are still suffering. Attendees created memory bracelets/bookmarks from beads to remind themselves of what they learned at the workshop and to share with others.

“Our goal was to give them the tools they can use and that they can use to help others,” says Rev. John Schuetze, therapist and professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief funded the workshop as part of its relief aid after the earthquakes. It also provided money for tents for worship, blankets, medicine, sleeping mattresses, and food, which the WELS mission contact in Nepal distributed following the earthquake—the first provisions people in these far-flung villages received.

Smith says that despite all the sorrow and loss, she saw something in the attendees—hope and joy—emotions expressed in their daily greeting to each other: “Jai masih!” (“Praise the Lord!”). “We saw joy there, even when you didn’t see it in other places,” she says, referring to the Hindu teaching of karma—that you brought disaster on yourself—which most people in Nepal believe. “There was so much joy and love in that little Christian community.”

Reaching Inmates With The Word

Mr. Brad Price received the call a year ago to serve as director of WELS Prison Ministry, part of the Commission on Special Ministries. Price was a non-traditional student at Martin Luther College on the pastor track when the Holy Spirit called him to prison ministry—a perfect fit for a second-career called worker whose previous experiences include a guard at a jail and military service. His previous experience cultivated in him a heart for helping those stuck in life’s darkest places.

WELS Prison Ministry operates out of a house in New Ulm, Minn. The main work of the ministry is mail correspondence. Prison Ministry has produced 35 Bible study booklets and corresponding tests that are sent to inmates who seek to study God’s Word. More than 80,000 inmates have received at least one of the Bible studies.

“We have over 300 volunteers throughout the country who are either test correctors or pen pals or make the mailings happen here in New Ulm,” says Price.

While the mail ministry is thriving, Price hopes to expand Prison Ministry efforts to include more face-to-face Bible studies in jails and prisons. He says, “We do really well with our correspondence courses. The next challenge is getting more people involved with the face-to-face ministry, especially laypeople, men and women, who are interested in going into jails and doing Bible studies there and sharing that way.” Volunteers, particularly women to minister to women in prison or jail, are needed.

“The reason it’s important we focus especially on jails is because a person might only be in jail for a short period of time. The average time is between three and 45 days for a jail stay,” says Price. “That means if they were to find out about one of our booklets, realistically if they were there for 45 days, they might be able to get one or two booklets. If we go to that facility, that means they’ll have the chance to be fed in the Word weekly—that would be six lessons versus two.”

Price continues, “It’s important to mention that we have training available for people interested in doing jail ministry and face-to-face Bible studies. If people aren’t interested in that or don’t have access to the jail, but they’re interested in being a mentor, we have mentoring program training as well.”

He explained that the first 72 hours of inmates getting out of prison often determines their success or failure back in society. If someone is there to meet them and offer mentoring, they have a higher likelihood of succeeding after their release.

“That might sound a little scary, and it can be, but a lot of the fear might go away if we understand the prisoners a little more, if we understand why they’re re-offending so often, if we understand what’s expected of them when they are released. It’s not an easy thing,” says Price.

Prison Ministry is supported by offerings, donations, and grants, which are used to produce, print, and mail the correspondence course booklets and tests.

If you’d like to learn more or volunteer, contact Prison Ministries at prisonministry@wels.net and visit wels.net/prison-ministry.