

# WELS NEWS

June, 2018

## **Conference Of Presidents Spring 2018 Meeting Summary**

At its recent meeting, the Conference of Presidents (COP) reviewed the pastoral vacancy situation. It was reported that there are 125 vacancies for pastorally trained positions, with 106 of those in parishes. The vacancy rate remains high, although it has not increased since last fall.

The COP has received questions about whether the Scouting organizations have changed in a way that would make it possible for WELS members to participate. In response, the COP has begun a review of the current nature and organizational statements of those organizations to determine whether conflicts with biblical principles remain. The COP will release a report and Bible study once the study is completed.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the workload for presidents of the largest synodical districts has grown to the point where steps need to be taken to provide assistance and relief. Since we continue to believe that it is extremely vital that the district presidents remain in parish ministry, any solutions considered would maintain that approach. The COP hopes to have proposals for providing assistance to the presidents of the Western Wisconsin, Southeastern Wisconsin, and Northern Wisconsin Districts by next fall. The type of assistance may vary from district to district.

The COP called Prof. John Boeder of Martin Luther College to serve as a Christian giving counselor. Another call was issued to Rev. Eric Roecker to serve as the director of Evangelism.

The COP has begun to work with the Commission on Congregational Counseling to provide guidance to congregations seeking to merge or consolidate. The intent is to help those congregations to reconfigure their ministries in a way that results in healthy and, with God's blessing, growing congregations.

Retired pastor Rev. William Bernhardt was recently called home to heaven by our risen Savior.

Bernhardt had served as the host of the *WELS Connection* for more than 25 years—from its beginning in 1987 until four years ago.

"As the host of *WELS Connection*, Rev. Bernhardt provided a consistency that helped the program become one of the most widely used communication tools in our synod," says Mr. Steve Boettcher, who produces and directs *WELS Connection*. "Every month Rev. Bernhardt had the ability to bring the sights and sounds of our synod to life for our members. Rev. Bernhardt's steady presence reminded viewers that all the various WELS efforts worked together—serving our Lord under the banner of WELS and ultimately for his kingdom."

Others have since stepped in to host the *WELS Connection*, but for many, Bernhardt will be the face that they always remember. We thank God for his service and for bringing another faithful warrior to his heavenly goal.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

## **Home Missions Approves New Mission Starts**

On April 13, the Board for Home Missions approved support for seven new mission congregations as well as support to enhance mission-minded ministry at seven other congregations.

"Being a part of the process that determines which new starts and enhancements to support is challenging but rewarding," says Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of the Board for Home Missions. "Our Home Missions Executive Committee takes a thorough look at each request to prayerfully determine which requests give us the best opportunity to reach more souls with the saving gospel of Jesus. We also try to determine which requests are ready and which ones might need a few more months of preparation. That is the challenging part. The rewarding part of the process is when we leave our meeting and know we've been blessed to start 14 new ministries that give us ways to spread God's life-giving Word."

### *Reno, Nevada*

The ministries receiving financial support for a new mission include:

- Reno, Nev.—Two area congregations are partnering to start this congregation in the Northern Valleys area of greater Reno. On March 25, the first worship service was held; 63 people attended.
- Phoenix, Ariz.—Crosswalk, Phoenix, is opening a second site to reach out into downtown Phoenix.
- Joplin, Mo.—A strong core of WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod members from the two nearest churches are helping support this mission.
- Brandon, S.D.—Near Sioux Falls, this new congregation includes core members from two WELS churches and an Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregation.
- Milwaukee, Wis.—Grace in downtown Milwaukee, one of WELS' original congregations, is establishing a new location in the area known as the Third Ward.

Two new multi-site starts are being subsidized by their original congregations. Home Missions will provide assistance through its district mission boards, mission counselors, and synodical support staff but not provide direct funding. These include:

- Hobart, Wis.—Mount Olive, Suamico, Wis., is starting a second site in Hobart. The congregation is calling a second pastor to begin this new ministry.
- Horicon, Wis.—Members of St. John's, Juneau, Wis., see an opportunity to reach out in nearby Horicon, where 90 members of

St. John's live. Saturday worship services are scheduled to begin in Horicon in June.

Home Missions is also financially supporting mission-minded enhancements to these existing congregations:

- Crown of Life, Corona, Calif.;
- Faith, Anchorage, Alaska;
- Grace, Seattle, Wash.;
- Ascension, Harrisburg, Penn.;
- Shepherd of the Hills, Knoxville, Tenn.;
- Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.; and
- Epiphany and First, Racine, Wis.

"It is our prayer that through these new starts and enhancements more souls will be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ and be brought to faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin," says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions.

For more information on WELS Missions, visit [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions).

## **Cameroon Mission Update**

Cameroon Missionary Jeff Heitsch and his wife, Stephanie, will be leaving Cameroon and be temporarily relocated to the United States due to internal political unrest in the country. They arrived in Cameroon in October 2017.

Conflict between the English-speaking and French-speaking parts of Cameroon began to intensify about the time of the Heitsches' arrival, and the security situation has deteriorated significantly since then. By mutual decision of the Heitsches and the WELS World Mission Board, the Heitsches will remain in the United States for the time being.

Missionary Dan Kroll and his wife, Karen, who also serve in Cameroon, were already planning on being back in the United States on furlough until mid-July.

The decision when and if to have a missionary return to Cameroon will be determined as the security and safety situation is monitored.

"It's always a difficult decision to remove missionaries from their field, but it is also important that we keep them safe as well as pray for our brothers and sisters in Cameroon who live in the midst of the strife. We have faith that the Holy Spirit will continue to bless the gospel-sharing work of the national church body, and if it is his will, that one day we will, once again, be able to serve this mission field in person," says Mr. Sean Young, director of Missions Operations.

The Lutheran Church of Cameroon (LCC) serves more than 650 baptized members in 32 congregations and two preaching stations. Due to various reasons, the LCC has not trained any new pastors since 1999. With the Lord's blessing, 13 students are now enrolled in pre-seminary studies. Both Kroll and Heitsch worked with the LCC to further develop

this worker training program. Currently, the LCC is served by eight national pastors and 12 evangelists.

## **Series Highlights New Members' Journeys Of Faith**

In April 2008, *Forward in Christ* (FIC) magazine started a new series called "Confessions of faith," in which WELS adult confirmands share their journeys of faith to a WELS congregation.

What was intended to be a one-year series has now been a staple of the synod's magazine for the past ten years. It's also one of FIC readers' favorite series. "I find it terribly interesting to read these stories about real faith in a real world. Being a Catholic convert, I am always interested to hear about how the Lord leads other people to faith through his Word," writes Dean Ebert from St. Matthew, Iron Ridge, Wis.

In this series, readers learn about what other religions and denominations teach as the new members share their religious backgrounds. But readers also discover what these new members find out about WELS and its doctrine. One recurring theme, no matter what the individual's religious background, is the focus on the Scriptures at WELS congregations. "Again and again these people mentioned that they heard the Bible's answers to their questions and concerns in our churches and from our pastors and people," says Rev. John Braun, executive editor of *Forward in Christ*.

One goal of FIC magazine is to build a community of WELS believers. This series offers opportunities to share stories from around the country that focus on our common confessional Lutheran faith. "I found that the frank and open confessions of these people were always uplifting to my faith. I hoped that it would have the same effect on our readers," says Braun. "The people are all so different, yet together with them we all share a common faith in Jesus and a commitment to the truths of the Bible."

He continues, "It's about real people in the real world searching for what we all need—peace with God, the promise of his love and forgiveness in Jesus, and encouragement on our journey through life. I hope we can continue to share how some have found answers, peace, and forgiveness in the pages of God's Word."

Read this month's "Confessions of faith" article. Subscribe to *Forward in Christ* at [nph.net/forwardinchrist](http://nph.net/forwardinchrist)