

WELS NEWS
March, 2017

Synod Capital Debt Retired

Late last month the final payment was made on the synod's capital debt. The retirement of the debt took place nearly a year and a half ahead of schedule.

Efforts to repay the debt began in 2009 after various synodical debts were combined into a single debt of \$22.4 million. An initial synod wide special offering called the "Year of Jubilee" was held that year. Through that offering and in the years that followed, the people of the synod brought gifts for debt retirement totaling approximately \$5 million. The plan was put in place to amortize the remaining debt by the end of 2018 by budgeting for annual payments of \$1.6 million.

Last year, with the desire to retire the debt ahead of schedule, the Conference of Presidents authorized a second special offering called the "One in Christ" offering. The people of the synod responded again with gifts of \$3.1 million. Those additional gifts and regular payments since that time made it possible for the Synodical Council to make the final payment on the debt late last month.

The synod is now completely debt-free. Dollars previously set aside for debt payment can now be used to support the mission and ministry of the synod. This remarkable achievement, accomplished during a period of economic uncertainty, is truly a blessing for which we can be thankful to God. We humbly acknowledge that it happened only by God's grace and by the power of the gospel working in the hearts of his people. Thanks to all who gave their gifts of love for this effort, and thanks to our gracious God for making it happen!

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Your Gifts, God's Blessings

Your gifts, God's blessings: An annual report to our members is now available online. The report highlights the blessings that God has showered on WELS through the gifts of its members.

Learn more about

- Cindy Liu and her fellow Christians at Savior of the Nations, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, who are building cultural bridges and helping people of all nations find peace and forgiveness in Jesus;
- Mesue Israel, a pastor in Cameroon who is serving a pivotal role in his church body's worker training program;
- Duke Backhaus, a teen from Tomah, Wis., who attended the WELS youth rally in Fort Collins, Colo., and was inspired by the Christ-filled workshops; and
- Jason Free, a seminary student who learned during his vicar year in Las Vegas that "there is this massive world full of people, all kinds of people, who are just waiting to hear there is a Savior in this world who died for them, for their sins."

The report includes photos of Christian brothers and sisters around the world, stories of faith, updates on WELS' ministry, and financial graphs and information to show how members' gifts are being used.

To view the report online, visit wels.net/annualreport. Print versions of the report will be sent to every WELS congregation and synod donor. Additional print versions will be available from Northwestern Publishing House for free as of Feb. 1. Visit nph.net or call 800-662-6022.

Want to learn even more about how God is blessing your gifts to WELS? Schedule a Christian giving counselor to present a PowerPoint presentation to your congregation that summarizes the information in the annual report. Contact the Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for more information.

Special Rates From WELS CEF

If requests for loans from the WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF) are any indication, new mission starts through WELS Home Missions are

on the rise and congregations are expanding their facilities. CEF makes loans below or at market rates for WELS churches that are either new and building for the first time or established congregations with a new mission-focused initiative.

CEF funds these loans through WELS congregations' and members' investments in CEF products. With the need for funds increasing, CEF is offering special terms and rates for new investments to raise an additional \$8 to \$12 million in investments. "If you are not an investor in CEF this is a great opportunity to support ministry. If you are already an investor, this is a great opportunity to increase your support of ministry by increasing your investments," says Mr. Scott Page, director of WELS CEF.

Investment options include expanded terms for loan certificates and retirement/IRA certificates. One of the features of this special offer includes an annual interest rate that is distributed and compounds quarterly.

"We're offering significantly above market rates for new investments," says Page. "Congregations are eager to grow, and now's the time to fund that need."

Investing in the WELS CEF is not only a smart way to manage personal finances; it also supports the mission of the church. Rev. Keith Free, administrator for WELS Home Missions, says, "The continued investments of more WELS members and congregation gives CEF additional funds to support missions and mission-minded congregations."

Rates vary by the initial investment amount and term length. View rates online. Plus, new to CEF, investors can now manage their accounts and invest online.

New Luther Movie An Opportunity For Community Outreach

In celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, two WELS congregations are kicking off a year-long opportunity for WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) churches to host local screenings of the movie, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*.

In conjunction with the WELS Reformation 500 Committee, Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis., and Holy Word, Austin, Tex., are pilot locations for the premiere of this engaging feature-length movie on Feb. 15. The congregations are serving as "hosts" for screenings in local movie

theaters. The local pastors will say a few words of welcome prior to the screening, and a Q&A session will follow after the film. Any WELS or ELS church, or group of churches, can set up a similar screening in their community—at no cost to the church.

This film explores the life of Martin Luther and his quest for truth, bringing to life the key events of the Reformation. “It explores the truths of the Reformation: Christ at the center of our faith, the importance of God’s undeserved grace, and the value of Scripture as the authority for all teaching in the Christian church,” says Rev. John Braun, chairman of the Reformation 500 committee and author of a new book called *Luther’s Protest*.

Mount Olive sold out the first theater and added a second showing to meet demand. More than 500 people are expected to attend. “Our congregation is looking at this year and next year as a way to key in on what it means to be a Lutheran, and we’re going to do that through a lot of different activities and events in our church” says Rev. Jasper Sellnow, one of the pastors at Mount Olive. “This movie is a good way to start this conversation.”

He continues, “Sometimes I think we lose sight of how important the Lutheran Reformation is to Christianity and what God accomplished through it. It’s a reminder to our church members that this is a huge event and an opportunity to talk to people about what it means to be a Lutheran.”

The logistics of the screenings are handled by a film distributor named Tugg. All a congregation needs to do is pick a time and date of its choosing and then tell its members about this opportunity to connect with Luther’s story.

“Hosting a screening is a great way for your congregation to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—simultaneously edifying your members and creating a memorable impression in the broader community,” says Mr. Lee Hitter, WELS director of Communication Services. “Plus a movie screening is the perfect outreach opportunity—a chance to invite friends and neighbors to a fun event that also communicates Luther’s message.”

“We hope the film will give all our congregations an opportunity to confess their faith as Martin Luther did,” says Braun. “Here we stand, confessional Lutheran Christians, willing to be counted as disciples of Christ in our world at this time.”