

WELS NEWS

March 2019

A Joyful Event In Puerto Rico

In the fall of 2017, Hurricane Maria struck the Caribbean islands of Dominica and Puerto Rico with a vengeance. It is regarded as the worst natural disaster to affect the two islands. At its peak with maximum sustained winds at 175 mph, the hurricane caused catastrophic damage and numerous fatalities across the northeastern Caribbean. In Puerto Rico, the population suffered from flooding, the worst electrical blackout in U.S. history, and extreme damage and destruction to property.

Our sister synod, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Puerto Rico, was severely impacted. The church building in Guayama suffered extensive damage; the church in Humacao was completely destroyed. Homes of pastors and many members also were damaged.

WELS members responded generously with gifts to WELS Christian Aid and Relief. But the devastation caused by the storm made communication with our fellow Christians in Puerto Rico difficult. Damaged infrastructure made quick efforts to provide relief impossible. It was difficult to know what needed to be done to help and how that help could be delivered.

Early last summer WELS Christian Aid and Relief sent retired missionary Rev. Larry Schlomer to the island. He was asked to stay for up to a year to help the church leaders determine what needed to be done and then to help organize relief and rebuilding efforts.

In the months after Pastor Schlomer's arrival, he worked, along with WELS volunteer Jerry Zimpelmann, to coordinate repairs to the church at Guayama and to the homes of pastors and members. They also coordinated the work of WELS volunteers who came to Puerto Rico to assist. Most of that work is completed. Significantly, this weekend marks a milestone in WELS efforts to help our sister church body. The church at Humacao has been completely rebuilt and will be rededicated in a worship service on Feb. 10.

Our fellow Christians in Puerto Rico have expressed their deep gratitude to God and to WELS members for this assistance. We

thank God for our partnership in the gospel with our fellow believers in Puerto Rico, and we thank God for moving the people of WELS to make these relief and rebuilding efforts possible. Learn more about WELS Christian Aid and Relief at wels.net/relief.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

WELS Members Support Christmas Outreach Program

Approximately 70 percent of WELS congregations participated in the synodwide Christmas outreach program known as C18. WELS Congregational Services created myriad materials for congregations to use to encourage members to reach out to the unchurched and to promote the theme "A Light in the darkness."

"When we began C18," says Rev. Jon Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services, "we said our goal was 'to reach' one million souls prior to and on Christmas Eve. I realize 'reach' is a nebulous term. That was intentional. It is impossible for congregations to track how many people a member invites to Christmas Eve. So it is hard to quantify. What I can report is that at least 1.2 million 'A Light in the darkness' Christmas Eve postcards were shared."

Hein also notes that through follow-up surveys, he has discovered ancillary benefits to this Christmas outreach effort. One of those benefits is a renewed focus on evangelism in some congregations.

One survey respondent commented, "I have prayed for years for God to make me bold enough to share the gospel. I have now done this . . . several weeks in a row for C18 and have had very positive results. I plan to continue this method of inviting neighbors to my church year-round for different events."

Another said, "I don't know if we had more visitors than normal [attend our Christmas Eve service]. I can say our people were excited about trying to invite their friends and family to church. I think they will continue to do that, which will have a longer lasting impact than can be measured by one worship service."

In addition to evangelism materials, Congregational Services offered worship resources as well as family Advent devotions.

As one WELS member wrote, "I loved that C18 focused on reaching unbelievers. But I also love that it stressed feeding our children with God's Word."

After hearing from WELS members about the blessings that this Christmas program offered, Congregational Services is now planning resources for C19.

To read Hein's full report about C18, visit welscongregational-services.net/c18-our-christmas-efforts.

Fearlessly Proclaim The Gospel

Students heard the voice of experience Jan. 16 at Martin Luther College's (MLC) 14th annual Evangelism Day. Following the theme "Fearlessly Proclaim the Gospel," 30 presenters shared their expertise and personal stories, encouraging students to communicate Christ in their personal lives and their public ministries.

Students had positive reactions "I've never been more excited to be a minister of the gospel!" says Josh Wordell. Abby Mleziva adds, "It's encouraging to see all the different ways that God's Word is being spread and then picturing how we can fit into the body of Christ doing the same work."

"It was a great reminder of why we're here," says Zach Kopplin. "I came out with this zeal for evangelism," says Aislinn Eddy. "It's not just about global missions. It's about evangelism right where you're at too."

For the second year, MLC offered four evening presentations to the public: witnessing to Muslims, doing ministry in Spanish, sharing Jesus with little children, and the role of reason in Lutheran apologetics.

New this year is E-Day Action Day, a follow-up to Evangelism Day on April 10. Students will take their learning to the streets as Dave Malnes, a WELS staff minister and the founder of Praise and Proclaim Ministries, leads students and other New Ulm WELS members in an outreach effort. Participants will receive two hours of training before they begin knocking on doors and a debriefing session afterward.

Listen To WELS Daily Devotion On Alexa

The audio version of WELS Daily Devotion can now be added to Amazon Alexa's "Flash Briefing" function. If you have an Echo, Echo Dot, Echo Show, etc. you can set up a "flash briefing" that plays through a list of available items, or "skills" of your choosing. You can hear news from NPR, the local weather forecast, a daily joke, and almost anything else you can imagine. Once you have it set up you can just ask Alexa to "play my flash briefing" or "what's in the news?" There are other commands you can use as well. CNET put together a nice article on how to enable this feature.

You can now add WELS Daily Devotion to that lineup. Each day WELS provides a three- to five-minute devotion based on a Bible passage. These devotions are written by WELS pastors across the country and globe. They are then "read" by a few individuals within the WELS Congregational Services team. What a great way to put technology to work for you as you sit over your morning coffee or get ready for work. In your Amazon Alexa app on your smartphone (or <https://alexa.amazon.com> on your computer) go to settings, then Flash Briefing, then "add content." You can then search for "WELS Daily Devotion."

If you do have an Echo (perhaps there was one in your stocking) and decide to use this "skill," be sure to leave a review in the app. This will increase the likelihood of it being found by others, who can then also hear the Good News! Look for more skills in the near future including our "Verse of the Day" and "Through The Bible" readings.