

# **WELS NEWS**

May, 2018

## **Exciting Ministry Opportunity In Vietnam**

Since 2015, WELS has consistently been sending members of the Global Hmong Committee and the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) to train leaders of the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC) in Vietnam in sound, Lutheran doctrine. While much needs to be done before fellowship can be declared with this church body, its leaders have expressed a desire to learn Lutheran doctrine and to become a confessional Lutheran church body. Rev. Bounkeo Lor, Hmong Asia Ministry coordinator, has been leading these efforts, making multiple training visits per year.

In the three years WELS has provided training, the Hmong Fellowship Church has grown from 65,000 to 100,000 members and formed 53 new churches. The message of free grace received from Jesus Christ has replaced their old law-based preaching and leadership, and their churches are expanding as a result. Church leadership has stabilized, and the communist government in Vietnam has noticed this positive change.

Thanks to the Lord's ever-guiding hand and blessing, the Vietnamese government has invited WELS to build a theological training facility in the capital city of Hanoi. This is an amazing and unexpected opportunity for our synod. As the HFC looks to the future of their church body, they realize the importance of equipping the next generation of pastors with the truth of the gospel. WELS will continue to provide HFC leaders with theological instruction and pastoral training.

This opportunity for further gospel ministry is great, as WELS is currently the only protestant church with official governmental permission to work with the Hmong in Vietnam. Our Home and World Missions team, the Synodical Council, and the Conference of Presidents are working tirelessly to fully evaluate and explore this opportunity, in addition to securing the funds needed for land acquisition, construction costs, and initial operating costs of the training facility. Watch for additional updates about this effort in the coming weeks and months.

As this opportunity lies before us, you may want to support Hmong ministry in Vietnam with a gift that will help to purchase land and build a training center in Hanoi. You can also continue to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters across the globe as they learn more about the freedom that comes through God's grace. Pray for continued blessings on the training that Rev. Lor and the PSI team are providing to the church leaders of the HFC.

You can donate online to support this effort. Select "Vietnam-Hmong Outreach" from the drop down menu.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

### **New President For Michigan Lutheran Seminary**

Rev. Mark Luetzow, pastor at Bethel, Bay City, Mich., has accepted the call to serve as the next president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., one of two high schools in the WELS ministerial education system. He will be taking over for Rev. Joel Petermann, who after six years of serving as MLS president, took a call to Zion, Torrance, Calif.

"Pastor Luetzow combines the heart of a parish pastor with a keen understanding of the work of a preparatory school," says Rev. Paul Prange, administrator for Ministerial Education. When Luetzow as a young boy decided he wanted to pursue the ministry, his parents supported that path by sending him to Northwestern Preparatory School (now Luther Preparatory School) in Watertown, Wis. Luetzow has had a heart for the mission of the WELS ministerial education schools after his experience at Northwestern Preparatory School. "I've always had a deep love for our prep school system, and in some respects I feel like this is a neat way to give back to something that has given so much to us and the WELS members who have supported us," he says.

He continues, "Michigan Lutheran Seminary has such a rich history, and it's very much loved by its alumni and the district as a whole. I'm hoping that love for the prep school will continue to grow—and not just in Michigan but in the entire United States so that we can have a bigger reach."

Luetzow has served as a parish pastor since 2003. He says he loves being a pastor, so it will only be natural for him to encourage others to do what he loves. "One of the things I'm looking forward to at MLS is being an encouraging voice for young men and women to consider full-time ministry for the Lord."

Prange says, "In area after area, President Luetzow should be able to hit the ground running and advance the MLS mission of preparing high school students for the public ministry of the gospel." Luetzow will transition into the role of MLS president following this school year. Prange says, "The synod gives thanks to God for Joel Petermann's careful stewardship of the valuable

resources at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. The whole Board for Ministerial Education appreciates his dedication to his work." Learn more about Michigan Lutheran Seminary at [mlsem.org](http://mlsem.org).

### **New World Mission Start In South America**

This summer two missionaries from the One Latin America (1LA) mission team will be moving to Ecuador. This will be the first time WELS will have an active mission presence in the South American country. Rev. Nathan Schulte and Rev. Phil Strackbein have begun making arrangements to make the move. Schulte currently serves in Mexico, and Strackbein serves in Bolivia.

#### ***Rev. Nathan Schulte***

Schulte, a member of the 1LA team, explains, "In the beginning of November all the 1LA missionaries met in Mexico City to discuss a major training program we are developing and the relocation of different missionaries to best accomplish our goals as a team. We want to reach as many people as possible and to train people to be leaders in their own multiplying groups. The team had done extensive research on a number of major cities in Latin America. Quito, Ecuador, eventually came to the top of the list for a number of reasons."

One of the main contributing factors to the decision was the large number of Facebook users in Ecuador, more than 60,000, following Academia Cristo online. Academia Cristo is a WELS Spanish-language website with videos and audio Bible studies to reach out to non-Christians as well as to train Latin American church members how to share their faith.

A second contributing factor is that with a location in Ecuador, it puts the missionaries closer to other countries in South America where WELS can't permanently locate a missionary for safety or political reasons, but where interest in the gospel message has been demonstrated through active use of the Academia Cristo website.

And a third reason is, while WELS has never officially had a mission in Ecuador, Martin Luther College Spanish Professor Paul Bases has been taking groups of students there for years to teach English, and through that work, valuable connections have already been made.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, says the main goal of the missionaries is to "facilitate the planting of small group churches in Quito and beyond." He says, "The idea is that in a short time, to connect Ecuadorean Christians to the online materials and relationships so that they're able to keep the

ministry rolling even after our missionaries might leave.”

Schulte says, “I love the fact that, from the start, we are focused on training Ecuadorians to study God’s Word and to share it with others. They know their culture and situations better than I ever will and God has already placed them in their own unique contexts with their own connections and opportunities. I’m really looking forward to working to help them to do just that—share God’s grace with others.”

***Rev. Phil and Kathryn Strackbein***

The missionaries’ first priorities will be to find a location for a Christian training center while also settling in themselves and doing boots-on-the-ground work, meeting their neighbors and learning more about the community. To help this effort, two congregations, St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis., and Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn., will be sending volunteers in May and June to host introduction workshops open to the Quito community. These two volunteer groups are the inaugural groups for the new WELS Missions Journeys program, which is starting to help coordinate opportunities and WELS members who want to volunteer in a WELS mission field.

Schulte says, “Ecuador, like all Latin America, is in desperate need of God’s grace. It is grace-starved. Even in many churches and Christian groups, the emphasis is not on Jesus and what he has done for us in our salvation. We want to bring people to the source of that grace—the Bible, to teach them to learn from it and to share it with others.”

Learn more about WELS Missions at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions) and check out Academia Cristo at [academiacrsto.com](http://academiacrsto.com).

**55th Annual LWMS Convention - Green Bay, WI**

The 55th Annual Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society Convention will be held June 21-24, 2018 in Green Bay, Wisconsin at the KI Convention Center, 333 Main St., Green Bay, WI 54301.

For more information go to [www.lwms.org](http://www.lwms.org).