

WELS NEWS

November, 2017

WELS Members Respond

When people are hurting, Christians respond. Paul thanked the Macedonian Christians for the generous outpouring of support they provided for needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. They saw a need, and their love for their Savior and fellow Christians moved them to act.

The same could be said about the members of our synod in the way you have reacted to the hurricanes that struck Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. In addition to your prayers, you offered generous financial support to help those in need. As of now, WELS members have given nearly \$700,000 for hurricane relief.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief has made grants to WELS congregations in Texas and Florida to address immediate needs for their members and for others in the community and has sent aid to Puerto Rico. Efforts are now underway to plan a more long-term effort to provide assistance. When plans are in place and can be administered effectively, WELS Christian Aid and Relief is ready to forward the funding that WELS members have provided.

We have been attempting to contact our sister church in Puerto Rico, but communications have been very difficult. We have heard there was extensive damage to at least one of the churches on the island, and we assume that the homes of many members were damaged or destroyed. As soon as we can assess the need and put plans in place, more assistance will be sent.

Even as WELS members have responded to these natural disasters, they have also continued their faithful support of the ongoing ministry of our synod. Through September, Congregation Mission Offerings are up 1.6 percent or \$231,000 over the prior year and 0.8 percent ahead of subscriptions. Thanks be to God for these blessings that have been motivated by his saving gospel.

Serving with you in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Special Forward In Christ Issue Celebrates The Reformation

In celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, the October issue of *Forward in Christ* (FIC), the synod's official publication, will focus on Martin Luther and the biblical teachings he rediscovered—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, in Christ alone.

"This anniversary is not just a review of past events. It's different," says Rev. John Braun, executive editor of *Forward in Christ*. "We thank God for the gospel we still possess today—a power that sustains us just as it sustained others throughout history. It's all about Christ! We still treasure his grace, and we desire to share that grace with the world."

Special features include a look at Luther's far-reaching influence, a history lesson on Katie Luther, and a focus on the heart of the Reformation message: We are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ. Another feature highlights comments about being Lutheran from leaders of churches around the world that are in fellowship with WELS.

Monthly columns and features will also have a Reformation theme. The "Confessions of faith" article introduces a woman born in Eisleben, Germany, when it was communist-controlled and tells her journey of faith. The "Heart to heart" parenting column shares perspectives from two dads about ways to teach children about the Reformation.

Besides the normal 36 pages, the issue features an added keepsake pull-out insert that includes a timeline on the development of Lutheranism as well as quotes from FIC readers about what it means to be Lutheran.

"As I read all of these comments, I stand in grateful praise to God for what he has done in bringing these believers to be signposts pointing to Christ," says Braun. "As you read their comments, I suggest you consider how many times they point to the certainty of salvation in Christ. That's a message we strive to share in every issue of *Forward in Christ*."

If you would like to subscribe to *Forward in Christ*, contact Northwestern Publishing House at 1-800-662-6093, ext. 5613; nphperiodicals@nph.wels.net. Or order online at nph.net.

New Set Of "Theses" Highlights The Basic Teachings Of Lutheranism

As part of its triennial convention in Grimma, Germany, this past summer, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) approved a new set of Ninety-five theses to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

While Luther's theses focused on the abuse of indulgences in the church at the time, *Ninety-Five Theses for the 21st Century* has a different theme. "It's really the basic teachings of the Lutheran faith organized according to the Small Catechism," says Rev. Thomas Nass, professor at Martin Luther College and one of the men leading the development of the theses. "I think it's what every Lutheran layperson should know."

Fifteen pastors from sister churches around the world put together the document. "It's something that the churches of our fellowship have done together to show how they're united in the Lutheran faith," says Nass.

Mr. Greg Vandermause, production studio manager at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn., produced a video of leaders from our sister church bodies reading these contemporary statements of faith at the CELC convention in Grimma. Hymns written by Martin Luther are interspersed between the readings. The video can be viewed [online](#).

"We pray that you are encouraged in the faith that has been passed down and that you find joy in seeing how that faith is shared by many around the world," says Nass. Purchase a print copy of the booklet at nph.net.

Home Missions Update

The WELS Board for Home Missions met for its fall meeting in September. Board members received updates from many of our home missions. Here are a few highlights.

- The three new home missions that the board allocated funding for at its March meeting are now staffed by full-time home missionaries. Rev. Doug Van Sice and Rev. Eric Melso were assigned to serve Huntersville, S.C., and Chattanooga, Tenn., respectively, as they graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in May. Rev. Paul Zell, a current professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, recently accepted the call to serve the mission at Hendersonville, N.C.

- Two home missions celebrated their opening worship services in September. The Way, Fredericksburg, Va., held its first official service on Sept. 10 at the local cinema, where the congregation is currently worshipping. Redemption, Watertown, N.Y., held its launch service on Sept. 17, in the new worship facility that the congregation purchased and renovated thanks to a loan and grant from WELS Church Extension Fund.
- Grace Hmong Lutheran Church, Kansas City, Kan., dedicated its new church building on Aug. 27. Rev. Ger Lor, pastor at Grace, says, "This was a big opportunity to share the gospel to the Hmong community in the area through this event. Grace believes that if the gospel is preached to them, the Holy Spirit will work through the Word to change their hearts."
- Rev. Lucas Bitter was installed on Aug. 27 to serve WELS' new mission in Atlanta, Ga. Seven WELS congregations are established in the suburbs of Atlanta. This new mission will serve those in the city. In August, core members of this mission staffed a booth at a summer festival and hosted college students from a variety of schools in the city for a back-to-school get-together. These outreach events resulted in approximately 100 people signing up to receive more information about the church and 40 people indicating an interest in Bible information class.

"Home Missions is grateful for the Congregation Mission Offerings that support all this gospel outreach as well as the support that our missions receive from other WELS ministries that partner with us," says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions. "In addition, the 115 home missions that WELS supports receive guidance and encouragement from district mission boards and mission counselors."

On Sept. 15, the WELS Board for Home Missions held a service of thanksgiving for its four mission counselors for their service in the pastoral ministry. Rev. Peter Kruschel, Rev. Edward Schuppe, Rev. Mark Birkholz, and Rev. Timothy Flunker offer support and missions expertise to congregations as they reach out in their communities.

Free notes, "Our mission counselors keep abreast of trends in North America and help keep Home Missions informed as to what might serve our church body. We're thankful for their service."

To learn more about WELS Home Missions, visit wels.net/missions. While there, you can also subscribe to receive weekly Missions blogs in your e-mail inbox.