

WELS NEWS

November, 2015

Strengthening The Bonds Of Fellowship

It's easy to forget that our synod is a part of a larger fellowship of confessional church bodies around the world. The recent meeting of the synod's Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) is a clear reminder of our close ties with those church bodies and what a blessing God-given unity is.

The CICR works to maintain those close relationships through continuing contact and communication with our sister synods. Annual discussions take place between the CICR and the doctrine committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). These discussions are intended to strengthen the fellowship relations between the two synods and to address issues of mutual concern.

Individual members of the CICR are assigned as the primary contacts with Lutheran church bodies around the world. Through written communications and personal visits, the contact men offer encouragement and advice. They also bring regular reports to the CICR of the blessings and challenges faced by our overseas brothers and sisters in places like Scandinavia, Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America.

The CICR is also responsible for overseeing appropriate contact with other Lutheran church bodies not in our fellowship. The formal doctrinal discussions currently being held between WELS, ELS, and the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) are taking place under the supervision of the CICR. At its meeting last week, the CICR reviewed the progress of those discussions and offered feedback to the committee conducting the talks. Reports of the informal doctrinal discussions with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are also reviewed.

Please remember the work of the CICR in your prayers. Please also pray for the Lutheran church bodies around the world that share in our commitment to God's Word and are partners in our God-given mission.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Massive Flooding Continues In South Carolina

Historic rainfall amounts were recorded in South Carolina as Hurricane Joaquin passed the East Coast this weekend. Officials are calling it a 1,000-year storm as the region received up to two feet of rain in 48

hours, flooding more than half the state. The storm was the worst weather disaster for the state since Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and has left 16 dead and tens of thousands of homes flooded.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is in contact with the pastors of the four WELS congregations affected by the severe flooding. “We have made an initial \$5,000 available to each congregation in the affected areas to provide immediate relief,” says Rev. Robert Hein, chairman, WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

One of the WELS congregations impacted by the storm is Hope, Irmo, S.C. Rev. Jason Zahn had to cancel worship services Sunday because of the roads being washed out. When he was able to get to the church, he discovered the fellowship hall had standing water. Members worked this week to remove the water and are using fans to dry out the carpeting.

The WELS congregation in Summerville, S.C., did not sustain damage to the church facility. “The bigger impact to our church is just people trying to help their neighbors. We have some members who have taken displaced people into their homes. We have others who are helping neighbors with cleanup,” says Rev. Jonathan Hein, Beautiful Savior, Summerville, S.C.

WELS churches in Myrtle Beach and Moncks Corner are assessing the damage and relief opportunities within their congregation and community. Christian Aid and Relief has disaster response trailers located in Jacksonville, Fla., and Mobile, Ala., with volunteers ready to mobilize within a 24-hour notice. “These trailers would only be mobilized if there were needs identified for generators, clean-up equipment, water, and fuel,” says Robert Hein.

“When you see the pictures and videos of the flooding, it’s breathtaking. Every human measure taken—sandbags, trenches, water pumps—could not deal with the devastating floodwaters. Please keep our brothers and sisters in Christ in your prayers in their time of need, asking the Lord to bless the relief efforts,” says Jon Hein.

Read more from Jon Hein on the WELS Christian Aid and Relief blog.

Learn more about Christian Aid and Relief and support its work.

150 Years Of Training For Ministry

Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., is one of our synod’s two prep schools dedicated to training and encouraging young people for the public ministry. This fall the school will conclude a year-long celebration of its 150th anniversary. Luther Prep is the oldest Lutheran high school in the country, tracing its history to the synod’s first efforts to train its own pastors just as the Civil War was ending.

The celebration will culminate with a festival worship service at the campus on November 15.

As part of its anniversary celebration, Luther Prep has begun a renovation of its chapel. For 60 years the chapel has played a central role on the LPS campus. It is the place where the Luther Prep family gathers for worship twice each day. These frequent worship opportunities emphasize the importance of the preaching of the Word, the continuing spiritual nourishment of LPS students and faculty, and the use of God-given talents in worship. The chapel is also the scene of a vigorous program of organ instruction, enabling Luther Prep to train more organists for WELS congregations than any other high school.

One major part of the chapel renovation will be the refurbishment of the chapel organ, now more than 50 years old and badly in need of repair. Worship is central to LPS campus life, and the organ is an integral part of that worship. The organ has already been removed from the chapel and will be installed in the remodeled chapel sanctuary by the start of next school year. The project is being funded through the special gifts received in connection with the anniversary.

The LPS anniversary theme proclaims that this school is all about "Lives Prepared for Service." We join the LPS family in thanking God for a century and a half of his grace and pray for his continued blessings on LPS as it trains and encourages young people for the public ministry in our synod.

Serving in Christ

President Mark Schroeder

Look for a three-part series focusing on the 150 years of ministerial education on the Watertown campus, starting in the September issue of *Forward in Christ*.

More Workers For The Harvest Field

Two seminary graduations in fields connected to WELS Missions took place this month.

A new pastor, Iliyan Boykov Itsov, was ordained as the sixth pastor of the Bulgarian Lutheran Church (BLC) on Sept. 5. Rev. Michael Ewart, chairman of the Board for World Missions Europe Administrative Committee, preached the sermon at the ordination. Rev. John Vogt, WELS regional coordinator for Eastern Europe, and Mr. Ron Drecktrah, another member of the Europe Committee, were also at the service held in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The new pastor was issued a call by the Europe Committee to be the coordinator for outreach to Romani, also known as “gypsies.” “Itsov, himself a Romani, is uniquely qualified to reach out across Europe to the Romani people since he has worked in several countries of western Europe and speaks seven languages,” says Vogt. Using his home congregation in the village of Dunavtsi as his base, Itsov will work with WELS Multi-Language Publications to prepare literature as well as seek to establish congregations as the Lord opens doors.

“Since there are family and clan links among the Romani people all across the world and since there is one basic Romani language used globally, it is the prayer of the Europe Committee that this new project can reach many for Christ in many locations,” says Vogt. Several European sister churches have already expressed interest in and given support to this new ministry.

Founded by WELS Missions in 1994, the Bulgarian Lutheran Church has six pastors serving four congregations and 355 baptized souls. The BLC’s leader has asked WELS to help with training three additional students. WELS does not have an expatriate missionary in Bulgaria.

In Asia, 12 men graduated on Sept. 10 from the seminary program of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) in India. Another 40 men are currently studying while serving congregations on a part-time basis.

Two friendly counselors help train these national pastors as well as work with existing congregations and national pastors. Forty-five national pastors serve 5,500 souls in 120 congregations. In addition, CELM operates seven children’s homes that care for the physical and spiritual needs of more than 200 children and Gentle Shepherd Lutheran School that provides a Christian education for 220 children. WELS also supports a translation and publications program that provides Christian literature in both Telugu and Hindi languages.

“World Missions works hard to train workers from within a culture to pick up the gospel work in that location,” says Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. “They know the people. They know the language. God makes them ready for the challenge. Every seminary graduation in these far-off places is an answer to the prayer Jesus asked us to pray, ‘Lord, send out workers into your harvest field.’”

Learn more at wels.net/missions.