

WELS NEWS **August, 2016**

New District Presidents And Their Important Role

Earlier this month four new men were elected to serve as presidents of their respective districts. Three of the positions became vacant because of retirements; one position had been filled temporarily after its occupant accepted a call to serve as professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

The following men have been installed as district presidents:

Western Wisconsin District: Rev. Michael Jensen of Watertown, Wis.

South Atlantic District: Rev. Charles Westra of Columbia, Tenn.

Southeastern Wisconsin District: Rev. David Kolander of Brookfield, Wis.

A turnover of one-third of the district presidents is rare. It seems good to step back and review exactly what the role of the district president is and what weighty responsibilities are entrusted to these men.

The district president is, in many ways, the pastor of his entire district. He is elected to his position by delegates at a district convention who represent every congregation in the district. His election is not just a selection by called worker and lay delegates. It is, in fact, a divine call from God himself.

First and foremost, the district president is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the doctrine and practice in the congregations of his district. Doctrine is what is taught; practice is how doctrine is applied and carried out. For a synod to remain faithful to the Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions, its doctrine must faithfully reflect scriptural truth, and its practice must carefully apply the teachings of Scripture in the life and ministry of the congregation. The district president carries out his responsibility of overseeing doctrine and practice in two ways: proactively, as he sets the tone through teaching and instructing by his words and example; and reactively, as he addresses situations in which false teaching may occur or in which the practice of a called worker or congregation departs from faithfulness to the teachings of the Bible.

If a called worker or even an entire congregation begins to stray from the truth, it is ultimately the responsibility of the district president to provide evangelical admonition and correction. Circuit pastors and district officers assist and advise him in this, but ultimately, faithful teaching in his district is a responsibility that rests on his shoulders.

The district president has a very important role in the call process. When congregations experience a vacancy—of pastors, teachers, or staff ministers—it is the district president to whom they turn. He consults with the congregation to determine its specific needs, and then he provides the congregation with a call list. The district president places candidates on that list because, after extensive research and much prayer, he is convinced that any one of them can meet the needs identified and outlined by the congregation.

The synod's constitution has charged the Conference of Presidents (which

includes the district presidents, along with the synod president and two vice presidents) of encouraging congregations and individuals to provide the financial support necessary to carry out the work we do together as a synod. In that role, the district president is the primary voice in the district making congregations aware of the financial needs of the synod and then encouraging congregations to support that work through their Congregation Mission Offerings.

Not least, in his role as the pastor of the district, the district president provides individual counsel and encouragement to the workers in his district. He spends much time getting to know the called workers he serves and makes himself available when they have questions, concerns, or struggles. He offers words of admonition and correction when it's needed. He also takes time to be sure that called workers are receiving the care and support that ministers of the gospel should receive from those whom they serve with the Word.

The 12 men who serve as district presidents receive no additional compensation for their important work. They have been asked by God and his people to fill a very important role. They do so with a deep sense of awe at the trust that people have placed in them. They carry out their duties faithfully, spending many hours in meetings and many days on the road. And we would not want to neglect the faithful support of their wives, who provide encouragement to their husbands as they carry the weight of their office and who willingly sacrifice time with their husbands for the good of God's church.

Take a moment in prayer to thank God for these faithful servants and to ask God to give them wisdom, strength, and joy in their service.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

Youth Rally Impacts Teens

More than 2,500 WELS teens and their adult leaders gathered from across the country and the world to worship, study, have fun, and celebrate the one who has washed away every sin and who guides us forward in his holy name, Jesus Christ. The 2016 WELS International Youth Rally, a biennial event, was held June 28–July 1 at Colorado State University–Fort Collins.

The four-day event, organized by WELS Commission on Youth and Family Ministry, featured two keynote speakers and several educational workshops focused around the theme “Our God Reigns,” a timeless truth based on Isaiah 52.

The rally kicked off Tuesday evening with a worship service led by Rev. John Boggs, chairman of the Commission on Youth and Family Ministry, and accompanied by the band Koiné. “The whole rally experience is designed to meet the kids where they are at today. It is designed for them to have fun, to be edified, and to understand and cherish the truth that they are not alone, that they have brothers and sisters throughout this country who are involved in the struggle with

them, who know Jesus and share the truth and joy that they have in him. You see that in the worship, in the breakout workshop opportunities, and in the late-night small group reflection time,” says Boggs.

The rally’s mission is to provide teens and adult youth leaders with Bible-focused worship, education, and fellowship opportunities that deepen their commitment to Christ and the church. Here is what some of the rally-goers had to say about their experience . . .

Duke Backhaus, 18, from St. Paul’s, Tomah, Wis., says he was impressed by the presentations offered. “The workshops were amazing; I really loved them. They all pointed me towards Christ and taught me a lot. I know now I’m going to be a pastor.”

Emily Gage, 18, from Good Shepherd, Woodlands, Tex., explains what it is like to worship daily with more than 2,500 other teens: “It was awesome to praise God with so many fellow Christians my age and to know that everyone is here for the same reason.”

Hailey Becker, 16, from Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis., attending with 58 members of her youth group, says, “I’ve been thinking about going to Martin Luther College after high school, and this rally really helped me with that decision.”

Grant Kloosterman, 16, from Living Word, Gray, Tenn., sums up his thoughts on his first rally: “WELS really is like a big family. It seems everyone knows someone and nobody here at the rally feels like a stranger. We all love each other. It was great to end each day with evening reflection time. It was a time to relax, discuss, learn, and listen with your youth leaders and friends on the incredible day we all experienced.”

Also at the rally, Youth and Family Ministry introduced a new youth ministry program called “Transformed: Equipping Youth Leaders” to youth leaders. Duane Vance, a youth leader from Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill., attended the “Transformed” workshop and says the new program is fantastic. “The synod is launching an amazing program that is really going to give youth leaders a tremendous amount of content and resources to help them plan activities and to train teens to become positive role models and mentors.” The program is scheduled to be released this fall.

Boggs says, “The young people of our synod are not just the future of our synod; they are the here and now of our synod. They need to be in worship and Bible study, and they need our prayers, support and attention now. The focus of the WELS International Youth Rally is to share God’s precious Word that speaks as much to them now at the age of 14-18 as it will as they grow older.”

The next WELS International Youth Rally will be held in 2018.

To view photos from the rally, visit [facebook.com/welslutherans](https://www.facebook.com/welslutherans) and Instagram [@welslutherans](https://www.instagram.com/welslutherans).

LWMS Convention Highlights Mission Work

The Chicago Area Circuit of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society

(LWMS) welcomed nearly 1,100 WELS women from around the world to praise God and show their support for WELS mission work. “Christ Alone, Our Cornerstone” was the theme for the 53rd annual LWMS convention, held June 23–26 in St. Charles, Ill.

Longtime missionary Terry Schultz was the preacher for opening worship, and he was amazed at the enthusiasm of the men and women attending the service. “To stand up on stage and see over one thousand women have such a passion for missions—it’s like no other church service you can imagine. Their support through their prayers, volunteer work, and their gifts allows WELS to bring that Bible-based truth to all ends of the earth,” says Schultz. More than \$30,000 was collected to support WELS mission work during the opening service.

During the convention, members attended several workshops and learned from home and world mission speakers about what God is doing through WELS missionaries with their prayers and support.

Dorothy Stone, Overland Park, Kan., has attended several conventions with her mom and encourages women who may be apprehensive about attending to just sign up and try it. “The convention has a flow and a feel about it that is not describable. It is definitely worth experiencing in person,” says Stone.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator for World Missions, explains how special the convention is to the missionaries who are able to attend. “The excitement of the many mission supporters at the LWMS convention is contagious. It gives our missionaries a glimpse of the joyful and thankful support so many give to our work. The gathering is a highlight on the calendar every year,” says Schlomer.

For many attending this annual event, it is an opportunity to share the experience with their family members. “As a mom, I definitely want my kids to learn that missionaries aren’t just people that maybe live in a different country; (that) we’re all called to be missionaries for Christ and we can do that whether we live in India, or whether we live in Indiana or Wisconsin or anywhere (that) Christ has called us to share the good news with other people,” says Katherine Schmoller, Lamb of God, Lafayette, Ind. “Thanks to the amazing dedication of our LWMS partner, WELS missions and missionaries continue to receive prayers, encouragement, and financial gifts. Such faithful support isn’t taken for granted. It is another evidence of the power of the Lord’s love moving hearts to support the work we do in the WELS through Home and World Missions,” says Rev. Keith Free, administrator for Home Missions.

Karen Fischer, LWMS president, sums up the convention and the importance of WELS mission work, “It was a wonderful, emotion-filled convention that underscored how God takes all of us – little pieces of rubble – to build his church as he sees fit, making more of us together than we could ever make individually and building a diverse church full of saints around the world.”

Next year’s convention will be held June 22–25, 2017, in Orlando, Fla. Registration opens January 2017. For more about LWMS, visit www.lwms.org.