

# **WELS NEWS**

March 2018

## **Conference Of Presidents Hold Winter Meeting**

The Conference of Presidents (COP) held its winter meeting during the second week of January. Items discussed and decided include:

- The COP was informed of a request to WELS Christian Aid and Relief to provide a grant for and assistance to the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Puerto Rico as it recovers from last fall's hurricane. The grant would enable a disaster response coordinator to spend up to a year in Puerto Rico to work with the Puerto Rican pastors to identify and prioritize specific needs, plan construction and repair projects, and coordinate volunteer efforts. He would also help to coordinate continuing theological training for two men whose training was interrupted by the storm. The COP expressed support for this proposal. (The proposal was later approved by WELS Christian Aid and Relief.)
- The COP is working with the president's office to identify and track retired pastors who are willing to serve extended vacancies or to serve smaller congregations in a semi-retired capacity. Many retired pastors have already been serving in this way and have helped to reduce the impact of the high number of pastoral vacancies in the synod.
- Five pastors from other denominations have either requested colloquy or begun the process. (The colloquy process is a lengthy and involved process that determines whether a pastor or teacher from another synod can be received into our synod and serve in the ministry.)
- There are 117 pastoral vacancies, with 97 of those in parish pastor positions. It was encouraging that this number has only grown by three since last October.
- The COP approved a request from WELS Canada that seminary graduates assigned to Canada be given the opportunity to accept or decline the assignment, as is done in the case of world mission calls.
- The COP approved a recommendation from Congregational Services that the Commission on Adult Discipleship and the Commission on Youth and Family be combined into a single Commission on Discipleship. Rev. Donn Dobberstein, who currently serves as director of both commissions, would be the director of the combined group.

- The COP approved a proposal to reduce the size of the printed *Report to the Twelve Districts* by publishing about two-thirds of the reports electronically. The date for distribution of the material would not change from previous practice.
- The COP appointed Rev. Joel Nitz to serve on the Support Committee.
- The district presidents and circuit pastors were encouraged to work closely with congregations in remote locations and with congregations that are not able to support a full-time pastor to ensure that their pastoral needs are being met. The COP also encourages Congregational Services to continue its plans to provide worship materials and other resources for such congregations.
- The COP continued its discussions on the workload levels of district presidents in large districts. A committee will be looking at options to provide appropriate assistance.
- The COP scheduled October 21 as the synodwide Mission and Ministry Sunday. Congregations are encouraged to place this on their calendars. Materials will be provided to assist congregations in their planning.

The COP expressed thanks to God and to our members that Congregation Mission Offerings for calendar year 2017 finished at \$21,358,000, an increase of \$298,000 or 1.4 percent over 2016 receipts. Actual results were also greater than subscriptions by \$138,000 or 0.7 percent.

Serving in Christ,

President Mark Schroeder

### **New Counselor Will Help Support Mission Outreach**

In January, Rev. Matthew Vogt accepted the call to serve as a mission counselor. He is replacing Rev. Peter Kruschel, who is retiring after serving in that position for almost 10 years.

Vogt previously served as pastor at Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev. He also was chairman of the Arizona-California Mission District.

“He’s going to bring a fresh perspective to the mission counselor role since he’s been serving as a mission pastor and dealing with cross-cultural ministries right in his own backyard,” says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions. “He will have that practical understanding as he works with others in the mission fields.”

Kruschel has been a fixture in Home Missions, not only serving as a mission counselor but also as a mission pastor in Florida and as the associate administrator of Home Missions from 1988–2000. A special service of thanksgiving for his years of ministry will be held at Beautiful Savior, Las Vegas, on Feb. 19.

“We in Home Missions appreciate the dedicated approach Peter displayed as a mission counselor,” says Free. “His gifts, organizational skills, ministry experience, and passion for the lost will be missed.”

Four mission counselors—one of whom consults with churches on Hispanic outreach opportunities—work with the Board for Home Missions and district mission boards to develop “big picture” strategies to reach more people in the U.S. and Canada. “They’re the voice of the lost—the people who are unchurched or who don’t have faith in Jesus Christ—in that they keep the focus on reaching more people with the saving gospel message,” says Free.

The mission counselors also stay on top of current cultural trends, help district mission boards explore new opportunities, provide training and counsel for new missionaries, and work with mission congregations.

Rev. John Dorn says the counselors have been “indispensable” in his work as chairman of the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board. “Not only working with the counselors on the board level but also having the privilege of working with them in establishing a congregation, I would have been lost without them,” says Dorn, who serves as pastor at Living Water, Oshkosh, Wis. “The counselors share ideas that have worked and not worked in other churches. The mission counselors bring experience in working with the Board for Home Missions and a special expertise in church planting. No price tag can be given to the time the counselors save our boards and the congregations.”

Learn more about WELS Missions at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions).

### **Plans Underway For Long-Term Relief Strategy In Puerto Rico**

WELS Christian Aid and Relief has announced its plan to call a disaster response coordinator for Puerto Rico who would serve for one year and work with the national pastors of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Puerto Rico to identify and prioritize specific needs, plan construction and repair projects, and coordinate volunteer efforts. He would also help to coordinate continuing theological training for two men whose training was interrupted by Hurricane Maria last fall.

The decision was made after President Mark Schroeder, World Mission Administrator Rev. Larry Schlomer, Director of Missions Operations Mr. Sean Young, and Rev. Tim Satorius, WELS Liaison to Puerto Rico, went to Puerto Rico in January to meet with national leaders and discuss further the most effective ways Christian Aid and Relief could help the hurricane-devastated island. Christian Aid and Relief approved the Puerto Rican church leaders' request to engage a Spanish-speaking WELS pastor for one year.

This pastor will help coordinate the logistics of rebuilding the church in Humacao that was taken out by the hurricane and repairing the damages to the church building in Guayama. He will also oversee the relief efforts of WELS resources and volunteers in Puerto Rico. Finally, he will encourage and guide two young men in their pastoral training so they can lead these churches into the future.

Schlomer says, "The whole country is in a recovery mode. The leaders of the church have other jobs and have their hands full with the spiritual care of the members. This missionary would be able to spend time on the many logistical questions that will be needed in rebuilding and repairing. He will also be able to quicken the pace of training for the two young men that the church in Puerto Rico have chosen as leaders."

Following Hurricane Maria, Christian Aid and Relief already has helped provide groceries to families in need and sent an immediate gift of \$5,000 through Direct Relief. An additional \$5,000 was provided for meals for people in the church and community suffering from this disaster. This enabled members of the national church to provide meals for 50 people a day for four weeks.

"[Creating this position] will help the community in Puerto Rico see our Lutheran churches in an active recovery mode with recovery help available for many. Knowing that their partner, WELS, is ready and willing to assist them will be a shot in the arm at a time when they very much need it," says Schlomer. "Our prayer is that the church infrastructure is repaired and even better than before. We hope that the two new national leaders are well on their way down the path to becoming fully trained pastors. We pray that the partnership with our church in Puerto Rico is vibrant and active to reach the many still lost in darkness."

Learn more about Christian Aid and Relief at [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief).