

Brothers in Christ,

A while back, the Siebert Lutheran Foundation contacted representatives from WELS, LCMS, and ELCA about the possibility of making a grant available to Lutheran churches in Southeastern Wisconsin to help them make better use of technology—particularly video streaming for worship and Bible study—to share the gospel. I was the representative from WELS who was part of this discussion.



Those other representatives and I discussed the challenges our church bodies have faced during the pandemic. There were many similarities:

- churches figuring out the technical issues, such as livestreaming
- the opportunities virtual content presented (reconnecting with straying members, outreach, etc.)
- the challenges of managing copyrights
- trying to encourage members who enjoy the convenience of worshipping at home to not make that permanent, but to return to in-person worship.

We came up with a plan, supported by Siebert, allowing us to help congregations within our respective church bodies. It would include providing a 9 to 1 matching grant (up to \$5000) for equipment and installation. Here is



how it works. It is called *The Digital Reformation: From the Printing Press to Zoom and Beyond*. (The thematic concept is that just as the printing press was a technological advance that allowed for gospel proclamation, so also digital technology could give us that opportunity today.)

Interested parties need to attend one online “Foundational Event.” There are three options.

- Thursday, March 18 from 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- Saturday, March 20 from 10:00-11:3 a.m.
- Monday, April 12 from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

The beginning and end portion of these “Foundational Events” will be denomination specific, i.e. you would be with other WELS pastors in the webinar. The middle portion of this presentation will be a discussion led by Rev. Joe Liles, an ELCA pastor who serves a mission congregation that has always used technology extensively. He has some helpful, practical insights into the topic. These three “Foundational Events” are all geared to focus on some practical “take-aways” we learned about technology during the pandemic: what it might mean for the future (e.g., Bible studies possibly being done more online than in person), stories that churches can share using tech, etc.

The representatives of all three Lutheran church bodies have spoken personally with Rev. Liles to state that we want *The Digital Reformation* effort to focus on practical/technical issues and avoid all theological ones. Rev. Liles has even been coached what to say if some webinar participant would throw out a theological question. For example, imagine that in the chat stream someone writes, “*What do you think about a church that was entirely virtual?*” or “*What about doing communion virtually?*” He would respond, “*Thanks for the question. That is one you should ask the leaders of your church body.*” That said, attending these “Foundational Events” would be like going to a free conference; it cannot be guaranteed that everything you hear is something you would agree with theologically. I have an outline of topics, but I do not have a transcript of exactly what will be said.

As mentioned above, at the beginning and end of those 90 minute “Foundational Events,” participants will be broken out by denomination. That is when it will be explained how the grant process works. A quick synopsis: the

Siebert Lutheran Foundation is willing to pay for a technical consultation conducted by vendors we have vetted. They have all done video/audio installations in churches. One of these vendors would come to your congregation and provide technical recommendations: types of cameras, where to place them, types of software, etc. These vendors would subsequently write up a proposal for equipment and installation. If your congregation decides to proceed, you then apply for that 9 to 1 grant. For example, imagine the proposal for equipment and installation was \$3000. If your church would raise \$300, the grant would cover the remaining \$2700. If you decide not to proceed with the proposal, your congregation is out nothing. The cost of the initial technological consult is entirely covered by Siebert. It is a great opportunity that I am thankful the Siebert Lutheran Foundation has made available. It could help your congregation, for a very low cost, “raise the game” of how you use video/digital technology to serve your homebound, do outreach, connect with delinquents, etc.

If you register, you will notice that there are other events and services offered as part of this *Digital Reformation* program. NONE OF THEM ARE REQUIRED. For example, there is “The One Day” event (April 17 from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.) that is advertised as “an interactive day of training, connection, and exploring how any church of any size can leverage content, tools, and resources to reach people in today’s technological age.” Rev. Liles is not the only presenter at this webinar, but he is working on the agenda. He has assured us this will also focus on the practical. For example, one presentation is about how to use analytics to determine if your digital content is being seen. Another is how to optimize Google searches. That said, once again, I do not have detailed outlines of what will all be presented. I believe if you and/or representatives of your church would attend (and listen with discerning ears) you would probably get some helpful insights. However, again, this is not mandatory to access the grant. The only thing that is mandatory is attendance at one of those three 90-minute foundational events.

If you register, you will also notice an opportunity to express interest in “coaching.” We could not come up with a great word for that: partnership, mentoring, counseling. If you would like advice on how to best utilize this new hardware/software . . . advice on how to target certain demographics with different types of technology . . . we can provide that. That can be denomination specific, e.g. I connect you with a WELS church that is doing what you hope to do. You will probably see references to other “coaching” opportunities other church bodies offer (e.g., “Neighborhood Church University,” an ELCA organization). That is up to you if you want to explore if they could provide technological help. I have not vetted them. If you would ask for help through my office, again, it would be connecting you with other WELS churches who have experience in doing whatever it is you are trying to do.

It boils down to this. Attending that 90-minute “Foundational Event” makes your congregation eligible to receive Siebert’s 9 to 1 technology grant. I have done my best to assure that anything discussed in those events will be practical/technical, not theological. However, again, I can’t guarantee what is said. If you are interested, here is the registration link: <https://ih2xshm2.pages.infusionsoft.net/>

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me at jonathan.hein@wels.net or 414-256-3227.

Jonathan Hein