A special Christmas message

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind” (Luke 2:14 Evangelical Heritage Version).

What greater reason to give God glory than to hear the message of the angels that first Christmas night: Because of this child born in Bethlehem, God was bringing his peace and good will to all people on earth. This was not just any kind of peace. It was the peace between man and God that was possible only because of the Savior who would bring sinful man and a holy God back together again. This was not just any good will that had come. It was the good and gracious expression of love from a God who would not let his people die in their sins.

In a world in which peace is hard to find and in a world in which the love of many has grown icy cold, God once again fills our ears and hearts with the message of the only kind of peace and love that really matters—the peace and love that reaches down to us and, through Jesus, brings us joy that extends to all eternity.

May these days of celebration focus on that gift of God’s love—his own Son—and fill you and your families with the peace that he brings.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder

WELS Christian Aid and Relief responds to South Central tornadoes

On Dec. 10, tornadoes caused devastation across the South Central part of the United States. Rev. Daniel Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, reports: “At this time, we are unaware of any of our WELS congregations or members who have been directly impacted by this storm. Praise God for watching over his people!”

Because no WELS congregations are near the affected areas, WELS Christian Aid and Relief is currently not planning to mobilize volunteers for onsite disaster relief work. “Because we don’t have the deep resources or infrastructure of FEMA or the Red Cross, it’s very difficult to go into areas where we don’t have a congregation nearby to use as our ‘home base’ for volunteers,” says Sims. “However, we will continue to look for opportunities to go to the area and help those in need.”
To help those affected by the tornadoes, WELS Christian Aid and Relief has sent a gift of $10,000 to Direct Relief, which has people on-site and active in providing disaster relief in the form of medical aid.

Sims is thankful for the response from WELS members wanting to help: “We are grateful for your support and your messages of care and concern. Your love for those who are hurting is obvious. May the Lord continue to bless our efforts to ‘do good to all people’ (Galatians 6:10).”

To help those affected by the tornadoes, you can make a financial gift through WELS Christian Aid and Relief’s disaster fund at wels.net/CARgift (designate the gift to “disaster relief”). Stay updated on relief efforts at wels.net/relief.

### Introducing the new hymnal

About 45 percent of WELS congregations have ordered Christian Worship: Hymnal and accompanying resources since its release in September. Most materials are now available and are being shipped to congregations and individuals who have preordered or are currently ordering. Christian Worship: Service Builder, a digital tool to help congregations with planning worship and generating service folders, is projected to be released the week after Christmas.

Resources are available to help people become familiar with some of the key new hymnal features and to help pastors guide congregations through their first use of Christian Worship materials. Resources include:

- Introduction scripts and a dedication rite.
- Video presentations that highlight hymns, psalms, and liturgies included in the new hymnal.
- Concert videos.

Some congregations are planning to purchase the new hymnal and resources in 2022, including St. John, Burlington, Wis. But even though St. John hasn’t yet bought the hymnal for its sanctuary, it already has started to introduce its members to it.

In November St. John hosted a hymnal introduction seminar where more than 100 people gathered to hear presentations as well as sing selections from the new hymnal and psalter. Both books were available for attendees to examine and use—and even buy. “This hymnal is something that will touch the lives and worship of all the members of the church,” says Rev. Kirk Lahmann, St. John’s pastor. “Because of this seminar, people were able to walk away saying, ‘I really understand why this is important,’ and that generates excitement.”

Now the church is working to raise money to buy hymnals for all the pews and enough psalters for the choir to use.

Once the hymnals are in the pews, the introduction process will continue. For worship services, Lahmann plans to distribute a simple outline to congregants and then have members use the hymnal to follow along rather than a service folder. “We need to learn how to navigate the book,” says Lahmann. “If we want this to be a book that is used in worship and the home, then let’s learn how to use it.”

Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director of the Commission on Worship, comments: “We recognize that congregations can be at very different stages of evaluating and obtaining new hymnal resources. Some preordered before the books were even in print for review. Some, like Burlington, waited longer. Others might not explore options yet for months. That’s okay. Whenever a congregation is ready, the online resources will help them explore the great benefits of the new hymnal suite of resources.”

Learn more about Christian Worship: Hymnal as well as access hymnal introduction resources at christianworship.com. Northwestern Publishing House also has published shipping updates.

### Deadlines for year-end gifts

Please note the following deadlines if you’d like your gift to be made in 2021 for tax purposes:

- A gift by check is considered completed when the check is postmarked (USPS) by Dec. 31.
- An online credit card gift must be successfully charged to your account by midnight on Dec. 31. This generally happens immediately when the gift is made.
- An online electronic funds transfer (EFT) gift must be processed by WELS in 2021. The deadline for these gifts is 4:30 p.m. (Central) on Wed., Dec. 29.
- A gift of stock or mutual funds must be received by Dec. 31. The date of transfer is the date of the gift. Note this may take a few days, so the earlier the better. Please inform WELS of what you are donating by contacting WELS Foundation at welsfoundation@wels.net or 414-256-3213.

### Special note for qualified charitable distributions from an IRA

For a qualified charitable distribution, the funds must come out of your IRA generally by Dec. 31. (If a donor writes a check to WELS from an IRA account, WELS must be able to cash the check by Wed., Dec. 29.) We encourage you to consult your financial and tax professionals before requesting a qualified charitable distribution.

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To sign up for the e-mail version, visit wels.net/together.