

TOGETHER

November 15, 2016

military contact pastors from around the synod convene to discuss and learn how to better meet the spiritual needs of members in the military and their families.

The attendees visited the Center for the Intrepid in San Antonio to see how wounded servicemen and women are being rehabilitated to live as normal of a life as possible after serious injuries. The visit gave the military contact pastors and committee a small glimpse into some of the obstacles veterans face when they return from duty.

Another emphasis of the conference was encouraging WELS military contact pastors to get in touch with the military chaplains on the bases to get involved in ministry. While WELS does not have chaplains officially in the military, the pastors near the bases serve Christians who are serving their country.


Mike and Diane Tracy know the importance of military contact pastors firsthand. Mike served in the military for 24 years, moving the family around regularly. Retired from active service since 2009, Mike is on the Military Services Committee, and he and his wife organized the San Antonio event.

"Military families have unique situations that other families don't have," says Diane. "Our [spouses] are deployed. We aren't near our families. It's a different type of stress added to your relationship. For the

pastors to be able to understand how they can better fulfill those needs and have the congregation help fulfill those needs, it's important."

She says having a chaplain in Europe was especially meaningful to her family. "We were stationed in Europe. The European Chaplaincy being over there, it gave us a place for our children to be confirmed, it gave us the chance to be able to worship with other WELS Lutherans on a regular basis. That's the most important thing a military family can have is spiritual support."

Diane stresses that military families need solid spiritual support as they face their unique challenges. She says, "The biggest thing that WELS members need to know is if they know someone in the military, they need to make sure the pastor who lives closest to them and serves their base knows who they are and how to contact them. Because if the chaplains don't know they're out there, they can't help them."

If you or someone you know is in the military, you can sign up for spiritual support at wels.net/refer. Learn more about WELS Military Services at wels.net/military. 

Synodical Council begins work on the 2017–19 ministry financial plan

At its meeting Nov. 4–5 at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis., the Synodical Council (SC) welcomed new members Rev. Duane Rodewald (chairman, Board for Ministerial Education) and Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn (chairman, Board for Home Missions). Rev. Chuck Westra, who has served on the SC as the chairman of the Board for Home Missions, now serves on the SC as one of the three representatives to the Conference of Presidents.

The SC continued work on the Ministry Financial Plan for the 2017–19 biennium. Last April, the SC was compelled to approve synod support levels that were flat for the second biennium in a row. This action was needed because Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) have been essentially flat for the last eight years and the financial stabilization fund (general operating reserves) is being drawn down at an unsustainable rate. The SC also knew that ministerial education schools and areas of ministry would need to use reserves if ministry programs and services were going to be maintained since costs are anticipated to rise 3.5 percent annually.

During its November meeting, the SC was encouraged by CMO receipts that have exceeded subscriptions and are 0.5 percent higher than the prior year through October, so it accepted the draft plan that maintained ministries while allowing some growth through the use of special gifts and reserves. Work on the plan will continue in February 2017, when the results of 2016 CMO are known and after congregations have submitted their CMO subscriptions for 2017. Based on that information, the plan could include additional expansion or, if necessary, the scaling back of expansion currently included. The SC is optimistic that the higher levels of CMO support of the past few months will continue or even increase.

The SC adopted a preliminary prioritized list of unfunded projects for the 2017–19 biennium and will finalize this list and forward it to the synod convention in 2017 as required by the synod's bylaws.

Insurance costs for the synod (not including health insurance) reflect a decrease of about 2 percent over the previous year. This decrease is the result of good claims experience, a soft insurance market, and increased risk retention that was implemented several years ago.



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First quarter financial results (July through September) indicated that the year is off to a good start due to strong investment performance, gifts, bequests, and continuing efforts to hold down costs.

The Capital Projects Committee has been working with the ministerial education schools to identify needed maintenance and modernization projects as well as new or expanded facilities. The committee has completed its initial work on prioritization and funding strategy for all projects. The SC has asked the Board for Ministerial Education to evaluate the need for identified projects, their prioritization, and funding strategies. The final list of projects and funding will be forwarded to the synod convention in 2017 for its consideration.

In view of the regular payments that have been made, along with the proceeds of the "One in Christ" special offering, the SC authorized the synod's chief financial officer to make the final payment that will completely retire the synod's capital debt by the end of the calendar year, nearly two years earlier than planned. We are thankful to God and to God's people for this special blessing. The final retirement of the debt will be highlighted at the 2017 synod convention.

The SC received a progress report from the Compensation Review Committee and offered input. The committee will bring its recommendations to the 2017 synod convention.

The SC recognized the faithful service of Mr. Tom Plath on the Human Resources Advisory Committee. Mr. Steve Schroeder, vice president of human resources at Wisconsin Lutheran College, will replace him on the committee.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder 

Graduation at Asia Lutheran Seminary

Six men from East Asia were among 27 students who received a degree or certificate Oct. 30 from Asia Lutheran Seminary (ALS), Hong Kong, at the school's seventh graduation since its establishment in 2005.

According to Dr. Steven Witte, ALS president, this is the first ALS graduation that includes pastors who do not live in Hong Kong. "These six students planted eight

groups and five local churches during their student years," he says. "Now they are no longer full-time workers and full-time students—just full-time workers. So things should pick up in terms of planting additional groups in East Asia."

Ten men—including the six men from East Asia—received Master of Divinity degrees (which means that they are fully trained to serve as pastors); eight received Bachelor of

Theology degrees. Others received degrees in Christian Studies as well as certificates for Greek and Hebrew.

Witte says ALS graduates serve in various ways. Some are full-time workers in the nine established congregations in South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM), our sister synod in Hong Kong; others are starting groups that will eventually turn into local congregations. Many are laypeople who are looking for a deeper understanding of confessional Lutheranism as they serve in leadership roles in their local congregations.

Special guests at the graduation included Rev. Larry Schlomer, Board for World Missions administrator, as well as the members of the East Asia Administrative Committee. Dr. John Lawrenz, who was instrumental in establishing ALS, and Rev. Karl Gurgel, who served as a long-time visiting professor, also attended.

WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder traveled to Asia Lutheran Seminary the week before graduation to visit with the students and staff and meet with SALEM leaders. "It meant a lot for the students to see President Schroeder at ALS," says Witte. "It helped them know that WELS values ALS and the work they are doing as students—and especially the work they are doing in the kingdom. We tell the students that there are many in America who know about them, pray for them, and support them, but seeing President Schroeder really helped put weight to those words."

Schroeder says he was greatly encouraged by the graduation of fully-trained pastors from East Asia and by the work ALS is doing to train future workers. "It is especially encouraging for me to see the work that is being done through the faithful and generous support of WELS members, who through their gifts are taking the gospel to places they will never visit and to people they will never meet until they gather with them around the throne of the Lamb."

Currently 53 students are attending Asia Lutheran Seminary, most part time or for single subjects. Another 11 full-time and 24 part-time students are taking courses through a satellite seminary in East Asia. ALS also works closely with Multi-Language Publications to provide theological courses to equip current and future translators of Christian literature. It has also developed an online course in Chinese called "Bible Background" that has reached more than 20,000 people in East Asia. Plans are in place for future online courses.

Learn more about WELS mission work at wels.net/missions. 

Meeting the spiritual needs of members in the military

WELS Military Services Committee, part of the WELS Commission on Special Ministries, held its annual conference in San Antonio, Tex., earlier this month. Each year the committee and