

Online presentation highlights historic synodical merger

The year 2017 is receiving much attention for being the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—and rightly so. A lesser-known, but not unimportant, anniversary is also approaching—the 100th anniversary of the amalgamation of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska Synods. In 1917, these four separate church bodies merged to form the Wisconsin Synod.

Rev. John Brenner, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., is presenting on this important time in the synod's history on Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. Tune in to this online presentation, titled "From Federation to Final Amalgamation: The Birth of the Wisconsin Synod as We Know It Today" at livestream.com/welslive.

"The merger of Lutheran denominations in 1917 laid the framework for our synod and firmly connected our strong confessional Lutheran approach back to the roots of the Lutheran Reformation," says Mr. Dan Nommensen, vice president of the WELS Historical Institute. "Prof. Brenner brings to life our celebration of God's grace in our synod as he reflects on the history of the merger in 1917." 

Did you know...

WELS has a Facebook page?
facebook.com/welslutherans

WELS has Twitter?
twitter.com/welstweets

WELS has Instagram?
instagram.com/welslutherans

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WELS offers a mobile application for the iOS and Android cell phone platforms. Get the WELS Mobile app at iTunes and Google Play.

TOGETHER



January 17, 2017

Synod capital debt retired

Late last month the final payment was made on the synod's capital debt. The retirement of the debt took place nearly a year and a half ahead of schedule.

Efforts to repay the debt began in 2009 after various synodical debts were combined into a single debt of \$22.4 million. An initial synodwide special offering called the "Year of Jubilee" was held that year. Through that offering and in the years that followed, the people of the synod brought gifts for debt retirement totaling approximately \$5 million. The plan was put in place to amortize the remaining debt by the end of 2018 by budgeting for annual payments of \$1.6 million.

Last year, with the desire to retire the debt ahead of schedule, the Conference of Presidents authorized a second special offering called the "One in Christ" offering. The people of the synod responded again with gifts of \$3.1 million. Those additional gifts and regular payments since that time made it possible for the Synodical Council to make the final payment on the debt late last month.

The synod is now completely debt-free.

The synod is now completely debt-free. Dollars previously set aside for debt payment can now be used to support the mission and ministry of the synod. This remarkable achievement, accomplished during a period of economic uncertainty, is truly a blessing for which we can be thankful to God. We humbly acknowledge that it happened only by God's grace and by the power of the gospel working in the hearts of his people. Thanks to all who gave their gifts of love for this effort, and thanks to our gracious God for making it happen!

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder 



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

Your gifts, God's blessings

Your gifts, God's blessings: An annual report to our members is now available online. The report highlights the blessings that God has showered on WELS through the gifts of its members.

Learn more about

- **Cindy Liu and her fellow Christians at Saviour of the Nations, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada**, who are building cultural bridges and helping people of all nations find peace and forgiveness in Jesus;
- **Mesue Israel**, a pastor in Cameroon who is serving a pivotal role in his church body's worker training program;
- **Duke Backhaus**, a teen from Tomah, Wis., who attended the WELS youth rally in Fort Collins, Colo., and was inspired by the Christ-filled workshops; and
- **Jason Free**, a seminary student who learned during his vicar year in Las Vegas that "there is this massive world full of people, all kinds of people, who are just waiting to hear there is a Savior in this world who died for them, for their sins."

The report includes photos of Christian brothers and sisters around the world, stories of faith, updates on WELS' ministry, and financial graphs and information to show how members' gifts are being used.

To view the report online, visit wels.net/annualreport. Print versions of the report will be sent to every

WELS congregation and synod donor. Additional print versions will be available from Northwestern Publishing House for free as of Feb. 1. Visit nph.net or call 800-662-6022.

Want to learn even more about how God is blessing your gifts to WELS? Schedule a Christian giving counselor to present a PowerPoint presentation to your congregation that summarizes the information in the annual report. Contact the Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for more information. ☩

Special rates from WELS CEF

If requests for loans from the WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF) are any indication, new mission starts through WELS Home Missions are on the rise and congregations are expanding their facilities. CEF makes loans below or at market rates for WELS churches that are either new and building for the first time or established congregations with a new mission-focused initiative.

CEF funds these loans through WELS congregations' and members' investments in CEF products. With the need for funds increasing, CEF is offering special terms and rates for new investments to raise an additional \$8 to \$12 million in investments. "If you are not an investor in CEF this is a great opportunity to support ministry. If you are already an investor, this is a great opportunity to increase your support of ministry by increasing your investments," says Mr. Scott Page, director of WELS CEF.

Investment options include expanded terms for loan certificates and retirement/IRA certificates. One of the features of this special offer includes an annual interest rate that is distributed and compounds quarterly.

"We're offering significantly above market rates for new investments," says Page. "Congregations are eager to grow, and now's the time to fund that need."

Investing in the WELS CEF is not only a smart way to manage personal finances; it also supports the mission of the church. Rev. Keith Free, administrator for WELS Home Missions, says, "The continued investments of more WELS members and congregation gives CEF additional funds to support missions and mission-minded congregations."

Rates vary by the initial investment amount and term length. View rates online. Plus, new to CEF, investors can now manage their accounts and invest online. ☩

Digital resources for your ministry

Over the last year, WELS has been expanding its digital resources to help in ministry.

For about a year, pastors have received an e-mail every month with the "Ministry Media Kit," which provides easily accessible, timely, and conveniently packaged digital resources that help congregations communicate with members about WELS news and ministry. The digital "kit" includes prewritten bulletin

blurbs and weekly prayers that can be copied and pasted into bulletin announcements as well as PowerPoint and JPG graphics developed for use on digital displays and screens. New announcements, prayers, and graphics every month share information about upcoming events and featured ministries and help WELS members stay connected to and informed about the work of their synod.

The kit is available online at cs.welsrc.net. A link is also available in every edition of the Together newsletter and monthly E-Bulletin Board newsletter. To subscribe to these or any of the WELS devotional or informational e-mails, visit wels.net/subscribe.

While the Ministry Media Kit helps connect members to their synod, the online synod yearbook helps connect called workers to each other and to members. The online yearbook is a searchable database that lists contact information for called workers (who agreed to allow their information online), churches, and organizations. Brand new this year, it also now includes a list of WELS churches that offer live Internet broadcasts of their worship service. The online yearbook is available at wels.net by hovering over "About WELS" and selecting "WELS Yearbook" in the menu under "Official Reports" or by going directly to yearbook.wels.net. ☩