

Appeals court to hear case on clergy housing allowance

For many years the federal government has allowed ministers of the gospel, as defined by the IRS, to deduct the cost of housing from their salaries (often referred to as the “Clergy Parsonage Allowance”). Last year, a lawsuit challenging this tax benefit was filed in a federal court in Wisconsin, arguing that this benefit provided to clergy is unconstitutional. The court ruled with the plaintiffs and declared that the IRS could no longer provide this exemption.

The case was immediately appealed by the Federal Government and will come before a federal appeals court in the coming months. The Church Alliance, an organization of church benefit plan administrators, has filed a “friend of the court” brief in support of the appeal. WELS has expressed its support for this appeal and is also participating in the effort with the Church Alliance organization.

While we recognize that this benefit, like other tax exemptions, is not one that we can demand from our government, we are very much aware of the benefits that this provides to those who serve in our synod as ministers of the gospel. Regardless of the outcome, we trust that the Lord of the Church will continue to provide for the needs of those who serve him in gospel ministry.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder 

New World Mission start in South America

This summer two missionaries from the One Latin America (1LA) mission team will be moving to Ecuador. This will be the first time WELS will have an active mission presence in the South American country. Rev. Nathan Schulte and Rev. Phil Strackbein have begun making arrangements to make the move.

Schulte currently serves in Mexico, and Strackbein serves in Bolivia.

Schulte, a member of the 1LA team, explains, “In the beginning of November all the 1LA missionaries met in Mexico City to discuss a major training program we are developing and the relocation of different missionaries to best

accomplish our goals as a team. We want to reach as many people as possible and to train people to be leaders in their own multiplying groups. The team had done extensive research on a number of major cities in Latin America. Quito, Ecuador, eventually came to the top of the list for a number of reasons.”

One of the main contributing factors to the decision was the large number of Facebook users in Ecuador, more than 60,000, following Academia Cristo online. Academia Cristo is a WELS Spanish-language website with videos and audio Bible studies to reach out to non-Christians as well as to train Latin American church members how to share their faith.

A second contributing factor is that with a location in Ecuador, it puts the missionaries closer to other countries in South America where WELS can't permanently locate a missionary for safety or political reasons, but where interest in the gospel message has been demonstrated through active use of the Academia Cristo website.

And a third reason is, while WELS has never officially had a mission in Ecuador, Martin Luther College Spanish Professor Paul Bases has been taking groups of students there for years to teach English, and through that work, valuable connections have already been made.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, says the main goal of the missionaries is to “facilitate the planting of small group churches in Quito

and beyond.” He says, “The idea is that in a short time, to connect Ecuadorean Christians to the online materials and relationships so that they're able to keep the ministry rolling even after our missionaries might leave.”

Schulte says, “I love the fact that, from the start, we are focused on training Ecuadorians to study God's Word and to share it with others. They know their culture and situations better than I ever will and God has already placed them in their own unique contexts with their own connections and opportunities. I'm really looking forward to working to help them to do just that—share God's grace with others.”

The missionaries' first priorities will be to find a location for a Christian training center while also settling in themselves and doing boots-on-the-ground work, meeting their neighbors and learning more about the community. To help this effort, two congregations, St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis., and Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn., will be sending volunteers in May and June to host introduction workshops open to the Quito community. These two volunteer groups are the inaugural groups for the new WELS Missions Journeys program, which is starting to help coordinate opportunities and WELS members who want to volunteer in a WELS mission field.

Schulte says, “Ecuador, like all Latin America, is in desperate need of God's grace. It is grace-starved. Even in many churches and Christian groups, the emphasis is not on Jesus

and what he has done for us in our salvation. We want to bring people to the source of that grace—the Bible, to teach them to learn from it and to share it with others.”

Learn more about WELS Missions at wels.net/missions and check out Academia Cristo at academiacristo.com.

T-shirts available for WELS Night at Miller Park

Join thousands of fellow WELS members for the Milwaukee Brewers' game against the Colorado Rockies on Fri., Aug. 3, 2018, at 7:10 p.m. For the second year, WELS Night t-shirts are available to order for \$5. Imagine thousands of WELS members wearing this brightly colored t-shirt, creating a sea of blue at the fifth annual WELS Night at Miller Park.

Tickets are now for sale. The Brewers are again offering WELS members up to 50 percent off the price of tickets. Seating will be along the third base line this year and in a block for WELS members. The pricing is Field Outfield Box sections 126 – 131 for \$21/ticket, Loge Outfield Box sections 228 – 232 for \$17/ticket, or Terrace Reserved sections 433 – 437 for \$9/ticket. The ticket service fee will be waived for groups of 20+ if you

contact Greg Souza at 414-902-4492 or greg.souza@brewers.com.

Tickets can be purchased at brewers.com/wels. T-shirts can be ordered at co-store.com/WELSNight.

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