

Social media expands reach and offers more connections

It started with wanting to offer more women in a congregation the opportunity to study together. Corissa Nelson, wife of the pastor at Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, decided to start a midweek women's Bible class using 2000 Demons by Professor E. Allen Sorum as the base of the study. With short chapters, already included questions, and a riveting topic, the book seemed a perfect fit.

The problem: finding time during the week when most women could meet. Also congregation members are scattered, many living at least half an hour from church.

The solution: social media.

Nelson decided to create a Facebook group where she would post a question or two a day related to that week's reading. Members of the group could comment and share their thoughts and ideas. While a small group from the church still met in person each week, this allowed more people who couldn't make weekday meetings to participate.

But Nelson didn't stop there. "Once I realized that we had bridged those miles, I determined we could invite anyone to be in the study," she says. As part of the WELS Women's Ministry Development Committee, Nelson thought offering this online

opportunity for Bible study would be a great way to build community for all WELS women. So WELS Women's Ministry began promoting this Bible study opportunity on its Facebook page.

More than 600 women from around the country (and even some from abroad) joined the group throughout the course of the monthlong Bible study, which concluded this past February. Nelson said between 300 to 500 of these were active, returning often to the site even if they didn't always post comments.

Nelson says that having this broader group involved helped Good Shepherd, a smaller, isolated congregation, feel more connected to the synod and other WELS members. "They were able to connect with other mature Christians and learn from them," she says.

Nelson is offering another women's Bible study, which will start April 9. This one, written by her husband Rev. Marques Nelson, will be on getting women involved in evangelism, based on the book of Acts. To join, go to facebook.com/groups/WMStudyGSLCR.

Learn more about WELS Women's Ministry at wels.net/women. 

TOGETHER



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Exciting ministry opportunity in Vietnam

Since 2015, WELS has consistently been sending members of the Global Hmong Committee and the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) to train leaders of the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC) in Vietnam in sound, Lutheran doctrine. While much needs to be done before fellowship can be declared with this church body, its leaders have expressed a desire to learn Lutheran doctrine and to become a confessional Lutheran church body. Rev. Bounkeo Lor, Hmong Asia Ministry coordinator, has been leading these efforts, making multiple training visits per year.

In the three years WELS has provided training, the Hmong Fellowship Church has grown from 65,000 to 100,000 members and formed 53 new churches. The message of free grace received from Jesus Christ has replaced their old law-based preaching and leadership, and their churches are expanding as a result. Church leadership has stabilized, and the communist government in Vietnam has noticed this positive change.

Thanks to the Lord's ever-guiding hand and blessing, the Vietnamese government has invited WELS to build a theological training facility in the capital city of Hanoi. This is an amazing and unexpected opportunity for our synod. As the HFC looks to the future of their church body, they realize the importance of equipping the next generation of pastors with the truth of the gospel. WELS will continue to provide HFC leaders with theological instruction and pastoral training.

This opportunity for further gospel ministry is great, as WELS is currently the only protestant church with official governmental permission to work with the Hmong in Vietnam. Our Home and World Missions team, the Synodical Council, and the Conference of Presidents are working tirelessly to fully evaluate and explore this opportunity, in addition to securing the funds needed for land acquisition, construction costs, and initial operating costs of the training facility. Watch for additional updates about this effort in the coming weeks and months.

As this opportunity lies before us, you may want to support Hmong ministry in Vietnam with a gift that will help to purchase land and build a training center in Hanoi. You can also continue to pray for our Christian brothers



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and sisters across the globe as they learn more about the freedom that comes through God's grace. Pray for continued blessings on the training that Rev. Lor and the PSI team are providing to the church leaders of the HFC. ☩

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder

New president for Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Rev. Mark Luetzow, pastor at Bethel, Bay City, Mich., has accepted the call to serve as the next president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., one of two high schools in the WELS ministerial education system. He will be taking over for Rev. Joel Petermann, who after six years of serving as MLS president, took a call to Zion, Torrance, Calif.

"Pastor Luetzow combines the heart of a parish pastor with a keen understanding of the work of a preparatory school," says Rev. Paul Prange, administrator for Ministerial Education.

When Luetzow as a young boy decided he wanted to pursue the ministry, his parents supported that path by sending him to Northwestern Preparatory School (now Luther Preparatory School) in Watertown, Wis. Luetzow has had a heart for the mission of the WELS ministerial

education schools after his experience at Northwestern Preparatory School. "I've always had a deep love for our prep school system, and in some respects I feel like this is a neat way to give back to something that has given so much to us and the WELS members who have supported us," he says.

He continues, "Michigan Lutheran Seminary has such a rich history, and it's very much loved by its alumni and the district as a whole. I'm hoping that love for the prep school will continue to grow—and not just in Michigan but in the entire United States so that we can have a bigger reach."

Luetzow has served as a parish pastor since 2003. He says he loves being a pastor, so it will only be natural for him to encourage others to do what he loves. "One of the things I'm looking forward to at MLS is being an encouraging voice for young men and women to consider full-time ministry for the Lord."

Prange says, "In area after area, President Luetzow should be able to hit the ground running and advance the MLS mission of preparing high school students for the public ministry of the gospel."

Luetzow will transition into the role of MLS president following this school year.

Prange says, "The synod gives thanks to God for Joel Petermann's careful stewardship of the valuable resources at Michigan Lutheran

Seminary. The whole Board for Ministerial Education appreciates his dedication to his work."

Learn more about Michigan Lutheran Seminary at mlsem.org. ☩

New training to help protect children

A new training program to help people recognize and respond to child abuse is being released in April by Freedom for the Captives, a WELS organization that works to protect children and empower survivors of abuse.

The program—entitled "Standing up for Children: A Christian Response to Child Abuse and Neglect"—consists of four videos that review dealing with physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse and provide a theological basis for the importance of protecting children. The course also highlights how to create and enforce a child protection policy for a church, school, or organization.

"We want to make it as easy as possible for pastors, teachers, and lay leaders to get some fundamental training on how to keep children as safe as possible," says Rev. Ben Sadler, chairman of the Freedom for the Captives committee and pastor at Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn. He recommends that all pastors, teachers, and lay leaders for children's ministries go through ongoing training like this.

Sadler says that having a child protection policy in place at a congregation or school and having ongoing training for those who work with children also encourages survivors. "When going through this training, it raises awareness in the congregation on how we might better help people who've been abused," he says. "It lets those who are suffering in silence know that [the church] cares about them."

Sexual abuse is widespread in our communities. The CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) study (1997) shares that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused as children. "I think there is still the idea that this is somebody else's church's problem," says Sadler. "Avoiding the issue won't make it go away. We need to offer hope that we can encourage and help people who have gone through these difficult situations. And we need to provide the tools to keep our children safe."

Funding from Antioch Foundation helped make this training program possible. This funding also is allowing committee member Mr. Victor Vieth, founder of the Gunderson National Child Protection Training Center, and member at St. John, Lewiston, Minn., to present at congregations, schools, and conferences in person.

E-mail freedom@wels.net to get access to the free training videos. To learn more about Freedom for the Captives, a part of WELS Special Ministries, go to freedomforcaptives.com. ☩