

TOGETHER *Synod convention edition*



July 29–August 1, 2019

Synod convention opens with worship

Nearly 700 convention attendees and visitors filled the Chapel of the Christ at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., Monday evening for the opening worship service of the 65th biennial synod convention.

WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder presided over the service and Rev. Jonathan Bauer, Good News Lutheran Church, Mount Horeb, Wis., preached a sermon themed “The bigger our picture of the Church, the bigger our prayer for the Church,” based on Ephesians 3:14-21.

Bauer says, “As we think about the work we do as a synod, it’s easy to see a much smaller picture than Paul does and, as a result, be filled with worry rather than confidence as Paul is. My hope is that the time we spend in these words gives us a sense of calm confidence as we remember Christ’s Church will never die or fall.”

About 65 choir members ranging in age from sixth grade and up from New Ulm-area congregations, along with 13 instrumentalists, including the piano and organ, led the service’s music. Many of the service’s liturgical elements, hymns, and instrumentation selections were a preview of the new WELS hymnal, which will be released in time for Advent 2021.

Mr. Earl Heidtke, a retired Martin Luther College professor who sang in the choir, says, “It’s a joy that the opening service is based on songs and liturgy from the new hymnal; it’s a great way to introduce it. And, the instrumentation is so broad.”

“For me it was exciting to hear the choir and voices together,” says Rev. Dennis Klatt, president of the Minnesota District and pastor at Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn. “The Word was so crisp and clear from Pastor Bauer, reminding us that the big picture is about Christ and his Word worldwide.”

“That service – was wow,” says Mr. Gene Szaj, a lay delegate from Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis. Saying he was at a loss for words after the worship service, he plans to call his wife to tell her to watch it online tonight.

You can watch the entire worship service at [livestream.com/mlc-streams](https://www.livestream.com/mlc-streams). 

Hosting the synod convention

Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., is the host of this year’s synod convention. The convention site rotates between three of the WELS ministerial education school campuses: Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

“Hosting a synod convention means that delegates and friends can explore their college and walk around their campus,” says Rev. Mark Zaring, MLC president. “The more they learn about MLC’s role in the Great Commission, the more people can pray for us.”

Planning already started for the convention in December 2017. Leaders and staff from MLC and the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry worked together to arrange all the details. “I love putting this puzzle together—from figuring out the right dorm room for a delegate, to the right shuttle for them to take from the airport, to providing the meals they need,” says Mrs. Michelle Gartner, MLC’s event coordinator.

Gartner says about 35 MLC faculty and staff are volunteering for the four-day event, doing jobs ranging from communion assistant to cafeteria greeter. “We are honored to host this convention and for the opportunity to welcome people from all over the country to our campus,” she says. “For many it will be their first time here, and we want to make them feel at home. We just love having company, and this and other events throughout the year afford us that opportunity.”

MLC hosts more than 100 events a year, everything from local business meetings to Children’s Theatre, which brings five thousand people to the campus over four days.

“It is a distinct privilege and blessing for MLC to host the synod convention,” says Zaring. “It is a great encouragement to me to see so many people who will return home with prayers for the kingdom work we do together.”

Learn more about Martin Luther College at mlc-wels.edu. 

**All convention documents and resources can be found at
wels.net/2019synodconvention.**

Rev. Mark Schroeder re-elected as synod president

Delegates re-elected Rev. Mark Schroeder as synod president Tuesday morning.

“It is truly humbling that you have placed this trust in me again, and I can assure you that it is a privilege that I thank God for every day that I get to serve you as your synod president,” Schroeder said to the delegates as he accepted the call. “Please continue to keep me in your prayers and God’s church in your prayers.”

Schroeder was first elected as president in 2007. This will be his fourth four-year term.

Rev. Joel Voss, pastor at Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, was also re-elected as the synod’s second vice president. He already has served in this position for two-and-a-half terms, elected first in 2009.

He too accepted his call. “For three decades of parish ministry and now a decade of serving our synod, I have experienced every day what you also experience—that when you serve the Lord Jesus out of love for him, you are always blessed back from God more than you gave,” said Voss. “It’s been a pleasure to serve our synod, and I appreciate your prayers and your support.” ☪

Looking ahead for the generations to come

Rev. Jonathan Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling, presented his essay topic following the theme of the convention, “For the Generations to Come.” In his presentation he provided an overview of current church membership trends, not just in WELS, but in Christianity across America, as well as the social and cultural factors that contribute to these trends.

The heart of Hein’s message focused on the real motivation for the work of WELS as a church body and its individual congregations—sharing the love of Christ, as Christ commanded in Matthew 28:19,20.

In examining membership decline, Hein noted that, if trends continue, WELS could lose anywhere from 260 to 400 congregations in the next 20 years. Hein attributes this decline to a few cultural shifts in recent years, including the acceptance of religious pluralism, secular humanism defining modern morality and ethics, the erosion of the traditional family, and increasing distrust in churches as institutions. Meanwhile, 25 percent of Americans in 2019 identify as having no religious affiliation, an increase of more than 70 percent in the last decade.

“We’re facing very real and large challenges, but the way the Lord always works, he takes things that look bad and makes them good,” says Hein. “We need to seek first that we’re glorifying Christ.”

He stressed the importance of creating a Christian community through relationships and building friendships with people God puts in our lives.

Delegate Daniel Douglas, principal and teacher at Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan., says, “It was comforting to reinforce my approach as a principal – that it’s about the importance of relationships. When you have a relationship with people, then that can open the door for ministry.”

Rev. Jim Strand, pastor at St. Paul, Bloomer, Wis., says the idea of encouraging members to let their light shine is critical to standing out today. “If you let your light shine, then people might ask why, and then you can proclaim Jesus. That’s the best evangelism program.”

In his presentation, Hein said: “We will help our members see the face of Christ in their neighbor. We will encourage them to build authentic friendships with those currently outside the church. Hospitality will be a core value among us. We will do whatever is necessary to knit our members into something more than acquaintances. They will have a family. We will zealously, almost recklessly, pursue the straying.”

“If we are doing all we can with the gospel, the numbers do not matter,” concluded Hein. “Only the gospel can create faith, but we need to do a better job of creating an audience for the gospel.” ☪

Presentations highlight mission opportunities

Delegates had several opportunities to learn more about mission work at home and abroad on the first day of the convention.

The morning started with women from the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society (LWMS) presenting the 63 flags of the countries where WELS is actively partnering in gospel outreach. Ms. Emily Kom, who just completed serving as LWMS president, greeted the delegates on behalf of the 60 LWMS circuits around the U.S. and Canada.

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, and Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry for Christian Giving, then shared more about the amazing opportunity that WELS has to train Hmong pastors and leaders in the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam. Through a synodwide campaign called Grace—Hmong Outreach in Vietnam, congregations and individuals have given more than \$1.5 million of the \$2 million needed to support the building of a theological education center and ministry education costs for a two-year period. This funding will allow WELS to provide seminary-level education for 350 pastors and catechism training for an additional 2,500 leaders, who will in turn share the gospel with the more than 120,000 members of the Hmong Fellowship Church.

Delegate Joel Bradtke, a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., was moved by what he heard about WELS’ work in Vietnam. He served for 14 months in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War. “Like a lot of veterans, I came back from the experience uninjured physically yet still carrying the baggage of participating in a war,” he says. “It is healing for me to think about the door that the Lord has opened. We’re finally able to beat our weapons of war into

plowshares—sharing the gospel—and into pruning hooks, pruning away the idolatry and misconceptions that some of the people we are reaching will have. I’m just grateful for the opportunity [for WELS] as well as for the healing that this gives me.”

Delegates also heard an overview of other exciting things happening in World Missions from Schlomer. Then they were able to dig deeper into several ministries at the evening’s missionary presentations. There they learned more about the work in Latin America, Hong Kong, and South Asia. They also heard about home mission outreach in Castle Rock, Colo., and Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions, presented more about the opportunities in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking West Indies in his report on Wednesday. ☩

Schroeder delivers President’s Report

On Tuesday morning WELS President Rev. Mark Schroeder provided an overview of the mission and ministry work WELS is privileged to conduct as well as some blessings and challenges the church faces.

Contemplating the idea of contradictions, Schroeder explained that what seems like a contradiction in a Christian’s life—or a church body—is no contradiction at all: “The details of our future may be unknown to us on the one hand, but on the other hand we know exactly what God has in store for us, since he himself has promised that all things—all things—will work together for our good and will be used by him to carry out his good and gracious will.”

Along with sharing highlights of the work of WELS Missions, Ministerial Education, and Congregational Services, Schroeder provided encouragement for the work the synod does and will do together and called for a recommitment to stand firm in the Word and share that message with the world, passing it along to the generations to come.

Here are some excerpts from his report:

“The Lord Jesus has entrusted his saving gospel, as well as all the truths of Scripture, to us believers and disciples. Our stewardship of those gifts involves two important and compelling responsibilities. First, we need to hold on to those truths for ourselves. That involves committing ourselves to remain faithful to the doctrines that we have learned. It involves defending God’s truth against all attacks from within and without the church. It means recognizing our Lutheran heritage, based solely on the truths of God’s Word, as a treasure to be embraced and retained no matter what the cost. But the second responsibility is one that flows from the faith and joy that the gospel has worked in us. That is the responsibility to share that good news with our children, with our friends and neighbors, with our communities and country, and ultimately with the world. And that message is not just for us and our families and for people today. It’s a message that we will want to preserve and proclaim for the generations to come.

“As part of a renewed effort to preserve God’s truth now and for generations to come, we have begun to focus our attention and efforts on how we can be more faithful in that stewardship of God’s blessings. The commissions of Congregational Services are leading the effort to focus our attention on encouraging faithful and zealous efforts to reach the lost, nurture the saved, regain the straying, enrich and preserve our worship, and grow in our practice of faithful Christian stewardship. At this convention, you will hear much about innovative new resources that will be made available to congregations as they strive to enhance their efforts in gaining and retaining members and in the area of faithful Christian stewardship. It is my prayer that you will take what you learn back to your congregations, circuits, and districts. We don’t know what God has in store for us if these efforts are carried out faithfully across the synod. But we know with certainty that he will bless those efforts in his own way and in his own time. His Word—and we depend only on his Word—will not return to him empty.

“Since we do not know exactly what God has in store for us, today is a day for recommitment. A recommitment to standing firm on his unchanging and powerful Word. A recommitment to sharing that message with the world and passing it along to the generations to come. A recommitment to live in the joy and freedom of the gospel. A recommitment to support the work with generous Christian giving. A recommitment to defend God’s truth when it is attacked and to witness to God’s truth when given the opportunity. A recommitment to support and encourage one another in Christian love and fellowship.”

Schroeder summed up his message, saying, “In a time when we worry about the future—at home, family, church, work—it’s really important that even though we don’t know what the future holds, God holds the future in his hands. That confidence guides the work we do as a church and gives us every reason to do our work with joy and leave the results to him.”

View the full report at wels.net/2019synodconvention. ☩

Delegates learn more about WELS ministries

WELS delegates began hearing presentations on Tuesday. Some of the convention presentations helped delegates as they worked in their floor committees. Others gave them a broader view of WELS ministries and the ministries with which WELS partners.

Rev. John Moldstad, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, brought his greetings from our sister church body and noted, “What a joy and privilege it is for us to be bound together in confessing the truths of God’s holy Word and also in putting doctrines into practice.”

Rev. Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, gave two presentations on Tuesday morning. The first centered on the amazing opportunity WELS has to train Hmong pastors and leaders in the Hmong Fellowship Church in Vietnam. The second presentation focused on the many other areas where WELS is spreading the gospel around the

world. Schlomer shared that WELS has a mission presence in 40 countries, with new mission opportunities in 25 additional countries. More than 700 people are enrolled in pastoral training programs around the world.

Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education, gave an overview of WELS' four ministerial education schools—Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. He emphasized the message that “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Mr. Todd Poppe, WELS chief financial officer, detailed the ministry financial plan for the next biennium that has been submitted to the delegates for their consideration. He explained the process that WELS areas of ministry follow as they develop a ministry financial plan and the current financial realities and forecasts that were used to create this biennium's plan.

Mr. Dan Johnson, president of Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., shared the college's mission with delegates. He noted that Wisconsin Lutheran College is WELS' college of lay leadership and said, “Wisconsin Lutheran College is as passionate about the cross of Christ as any other WELS ministry I've served. . . . The anchor of our school is the joy we have to promote spiritual growth to our students.” ☩

New partners in Christ

Delegates welcomed two new church bodies—the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ—Kenya (LCMC) and the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church of Taiwan (CLEC)—into confessional Lutheran fellowship with WELS on Wednesday morning.

Representatives from both Kenya and Taiwan were present at the convention: Rev. Mark Onunda, chairman of the LCMC, and his wife, Grace, and Rev. Peter Chen and Mr. Michael Lin from the CLEC.

“My wife and I have traveled far to be with you these few days,” said Onunda when addressing the delegates. “Our short time together will secure a lifelong partnership to advance our positions in many fields of battle.”

The LCMC, a church body of 25 pastors, 46 congregations, and between 3,000 and 5,000 members, is relatively young. Registered as an independent church body in Kenya in 2013, it formed after several of its pastors and churches broke away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya because of false teachings. This fledging church body immediately began searching for like-minded confessional Lutherans. After they made contact with WELS World Missions in 2014, Prof. E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute, visited Onunda for the first time in Kenya in 2015. The Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia, WELS' sister synod, declared fellowship with the LCMC last September.

“With our blessed partnership in place, your brothers and sisters in Kenya can now attend to our most pressing

challenges,” says Onunda. “We want to be aggressive in our mission work. We want to be strong in our encouragement of the pastors and congregations already in our church body. . . . There is also the pressing challenge of human need and suffering among our Lutheran people in Kenya.” This includes partnering with WELS to serve South Sudanese refugees living in Kakuma, Kenya.

The Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church (CLEC) in Taiwan started as a mission of WELS, with missionaries serving there from 1979 through 2013. The CLEC is now an independent church body.

“We are happy to be united with WELS in faith,” said Chen to the delegates. “WELS is like a mother to us.”

Chen notes that church members were unsure about what would happen to their church when the missionaries left. “When I go back, I can let my members know WELS hasn't left us!” he says. “Now they declare we are in fellowship with each other so even if there are no missionaries in Taiwan, it doesn't make a difference. We are one.”

Chen was also impressed by the theme of the convention, “For the generations to come.” He is training Lin to be a leader for one of the four CLEC churches. Lin will finish his training this year. “This is a good chance to pass on the whole idea of who we are and who we belong to for the next generation,” he says.

This was Lin's first trip to the United States. He was amazed by the opening worship service. “I will go back [to my congregation] with lots of pictures and stories. I can tell them this is the way our mother church is,” he says.

The CLEC has four congregations, one pastor (Chen), and about 100 members. Three men, including Lin, are training to serve congregations as tent ministers. It is reaching out in a country of 23 million people, of which 5 percent are Christian. “Please pray for us,” says Chen.

Delegates celebrated the declaration of fellowship by joining together to sing, “Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation” (*Christian Worship* 531). ☩

Delegates approve ministry financial plan

On Wednesday afternoon, synod convention delegates approved the Synodical Council's proposed ministry financial plan—or budget—with no changes.

“This plan balances trust that God will continue to provide with the many mission opportunities that he is placing before us,” says Rev. Steven Gabb, chairman of the Ministry Financial Plan Floor Committee.

Rev. Jonathan Schroeder, chairman of the Synodical Council's Ministry Committee, explains that the development of the ministry financial plan is a collaborative process between the areas of ministry, synod leadership, and the Synodical Council.

“It's that collaboration that has impressed me most during my 10 years serving on the Synodical Council,” says Schroeder. “These groups work together to develop a plan that balances resources with priorities and emerging opportunities.”

President Schroeder and his advisory committee bring a kingdom-wide perspective to the task.”

The Synodical Council divides the responsibility for the ministry financial plan between the Finance Committee and the Ministry Committee. The Finance Committee determines the financial support levels and the total size of the budget. The Ministry Committee then allocates the resources to the various areas of ministry.

“The hardest part of the process comes when we have to determine which initiatives or projects won’t be included in the ministry financial plan,” says Schroeder. “For each synod convention we prepare a list of unfunded priorities to show the delegates the ministry programs we could accomplish if God blesses us with more resources.”

In a separate resolution on Wednesday, synod convention delegates also passed the unfunded priority list proposed by the Synodical Council.

“WELS is financially sound and the budget is balanced,” notes Mr. Todd Poppe, chief financial officer of WELS. “The increases in support that we have forecast are modest, so ministry opportunities have been left unfilled. If God blesses us with more than we forecast, we can begin to fund items on the unfunded priority list.”

Schroeder concludes by saying, “Every year God’s people provide these amazing gifts through Congregation Mission Offerings and individual offerings. It is a high privilege to be involved in organizing how they are implemented to fulfill Christ’s mission to call the elect to faith through the gospel.”

New capital campaign for Martin Luther College announced

On Wednesday evening, delegates learned about a new two-year capital campaign for Martin Luther College (MLC) called “Equipping Christian Witnesses.” This campaign will help MLC celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2020.

“Our gracious Savior, who ‘is not willing that any should perish,’ is opening mission doors beyond our imagination!” says Rev. Mark Zarleng, MLC president. “As the WELS College of Ministry, we at Martin Luther College want to seize these opportunities—to his glory! Now is the time for all of us to equip even more Christian witnesses to share Christ’s love with the world. This is what this campaign is all about.”

Zarleng shared that the three pillars of the campaign are student recruitment, student financial aid, and student facilities.

Currently MLC enrolls about 750 on-campus undergraduate students. The goal is to have 900 to 1,000 students eager to train for gospel ministry. Zarleng reminded delegates that they can help recruit students—both traditional and second-career—to pursue the gospel ministry, both by encouraging young adults they know or by submitting names of potential future students to MLC at mlc-wels.edu/go/recommend.

To help students graduate with as little educational debt as possible, MLC is working to fully fund its Congregational

Partner Grant Program (CPGP) Matching Fund for years to come. Through CPGP, MLC matches dollar for dollar, up to \$1,000, the gift a congregation gathers to apply to the tuition of their student at MLC. MLC has a goal of raising \$3 to \$5 million for this second pillar of the campaign.

Finally, MLC wants to build a new residence hall and renovate its current dormitories to meet the need of the next generation. It also wants to construct a new turf recreation facility so that students can participate in sports year-round. “For many years, we have not had adequate athletic space—for our student body, our teams, or visiting teams. The new Knight Center will meet these pressing needs of today and help us offer expanded health and wellness opportunities tomorrow,” says Zarleng.

With the support of the Conference of Presidents, WELS is looking to raise \$16 to \$18 million in total through this campaign. Congregations have already received information about how they can participate.

After delegates learned about how they can be involved in the campaign, MLC staff offered tours of the campus so that delegates could learn more about the campus and plans for the future.

Learn more about “Equipping Christian Witnesses” at mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign.

Congregational Services presents scope of work

WELS Congregational Services comprises several areas of ministry committed to guiding and assisting WELS congregations and schools in conducting local ministry.

The Commissions on Congregational Counseling, Worship, Discipleship, Evangelism, Lutheran Schools, and Special Ministries all provided overviews and updates from their respective ministries.

Rev. Jonathan Hein, Congregational Services coordinator, introduced the upcoming Lutheran Leadership Conference being held January 21-23, 2020, in Chicago. The conference will feature sessions that address issues many congregations face in local ministry and congregational operations. Find out more about the conference at lutheranleadership.com.

Congregational Counseling

Congregational Counseling (CCC) helps congregations assess their needs and develop strategic plans for local ministry. They accomplish this through a Self-Assessment and Adjustment Program; Ministry, Organization, and Staffing Evaluation; and the School of Strategic Planning. The CCC is working to train circuit pastors to proactively assist congregations in doing self-assessments and setting and meeting goals.

Evangelism

Evangelism aims to instruct members on reaching out in their communities by creating a congregational outreach culture. One resource to accomplish this is the upcoming C19 program. Much like the C18 program over the 2018

Christmas season, C19 resources will be developed and available to aid congregations in their evangelism efforts over the Christmas season. For year-round efforts, a video-based online congregational evangelism kit to train congregational leadership is available on welscongregationalervices.net.

Rev. Eric Roecker, Commission on Evangelism director, introduced the upcoming *Let's Go* initiative, planned for summer 2020. This online training program is being developed to help any Christian become a more informed gospel witness by helping to remove fears and provide tools.

Discipleship

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, Commission on Discipleship director, presented *Welcome Home*, an effort to care for the 155,000 WELS members who don't attend church regularly and "welcome them home" to active church life. Every member will be encouraged to attend on this special Sunday, which can be held on October 20 or October 27. *Welcome Home* includes a worship series that encompasses the season of End Times as well as elder training resources to assist church leadership in compassionately and zealously meeting the spiritual needs of delinquent members.

A new stewardship program, *10 for 10*, suggested to start in September, is a three-Sunday emphasis on the biblical principles of giving. *10 for 10* is designed to incorporate Bible studies into the weekly worship service over three weeks, then for the next 10 weeks to challenge members to increase giving. *10 for 10* stands for tithing for 10 weeks.

Resources for *Welcome Home* and *10 for 10* are available at welscongregationalervices.net.

Future priorities include focusing on strengthening families and home devotional life, anchoring young people ages 14 to 24 to their church, encouraging small groups in congregations, improving Sunday schools, and creatively approaching adult instruction.

Also announced was the 2020 WELS International Youth Rally, June 23-26, 2020, in Knoxville, Tenn. More information will be available in upcoming issues of the WELS "Together" e-newsletter.

Worship

The Commission on Worship is assisting in the development of the new WELS Hymnal, scheduled to be introduced in 2021. Rev. Bryan Gerlach, Commission on Worship director, suggested congregations start budgeting for the new printed hymnals as well as the supplemental books and digital tools.

Lutheran Schools


The Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS) provides resources, training, and support for WELS schools and teachers. Mr. James Rademan, Commission on Lutheran Schools director, discussed the changing landscape of Lutheran elementary schools. About 15 percent of elementary students and 29 percent of early childhood students are now from families without a church home, creating a tremendous outreach opportunity. To help meet this opportunity, CLS offers the *Telling the Next Generation* program to assist schools in creating outreach plans.

Looking ahead, CLS is focused on recruiting and training principals and early childhood directors to help meet vacancies as well as mentoring and supporting new principals and directors. This helps mitigate the number of new graduates stepping into these roles without appropriate training and experience.

Special Ministries

Rev. Jim Behringer, Commission on Special Ministries director, said Special Ministries is about compassion, outreach, and inclusion—removing barriers that prevent people from hearing the gospel. The Special Ministries umbrella covers eight specialized areas: Mission for the Visually Impaired, Care Committee for Called Workers, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry, Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Commission on Mental Health, Health and Wellness Committee, Military Services, and Prison Ministry, which is marking 25 years of ministry.

Special Ministries invites members to sign up to help meet the spiritual needs of those impacted by incarceration, those serving in the military and their families, and families with loved ones with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Go to wels.net/refer.

To learn more about the many ways Special Ministries serves congregations and members, visit wels.net/special-ministries. 

Delegates complete election of committee members

One of the responsibilities of synod convention delegates is to elect members and chairmen for a variety of synod committees and boards. On Wednesday morning, delegates completed their voting, and the names of those elected were reported by the Elections Floor Committee.


Rev. John Boggs, pastor at Divine Savior, West Palm Beach, Fla., was re-elected as chairman of the Commission on Discipleship.

"I consider it a great privilege to continue to serve our gracious God in this way," says Boggs. "As chairman of the commission, I see myself partnering with our administrator, our commission members, and Congregational Services as a whole to get resources, encouragement, and ministry tools into the hands of leaders in our congregations."

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, director of Discipleship, also appreciates this partnership. He notes, "The ministry of Discipleship is so vast. A 'just-me-and-no-more' style of leadership would be at best a lonely way to do ministry and at worst a horrifying waste of the members of the body of Christ, which he loaded with gifts and abilities."

"I believe it is critical for WELS leadership to continue to involve both called workers and lay leaders serving in congregations throughout our nation and the world to be involved in helping lead WELS forward in the blessed work our God has given us to do," says Boggs. "Working together, I believe we can better understand the challenges before us

as well as plan and implement ministry tools that address these challenges. We truly can accomplish more together than by ourselves.”

The full list of election results is available at wels.net/2019synodconvention. 

Ministry presentations filled Wednesday

Throughout Wednesday, delegates heard about several ministries.

Rev. Keith Free, WELS Home Missions administrator, and Rev. Wayne Uhlhorn, Board for Home Missions chairman, provided an update on the scope of Home Missions’ ministry. Home Missions has provided support for 89 new mission starts and enhancements since 2011. In 2019, the Board for Home Missions approved three new starts and one enhancement. In addition to starting new churches and providing support for mission-focused ministry enhancements, Home Missions also supports WELS Campus Ministry and cross-cultural ministries serving Hispanic, Hmong, Korean, South Sudanese, and more. Learn more about Home Missions at wels.net/missions.

Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) shared the history of the synod’s publishing house, from its beginnings in 1902 to its recent move to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry in May. Rev. Curtis Jahn, vice president of publishing services at NPH, provided a look at many resources NPH offers, ranging from children’s curriculum, devotionals, adult Bible study materials, music resources, and more. Learn what NPH has to offer at nph.net.

Rev. Joel Pless from the WELS Historical Institute invited delegates to learn more WELS history by visiting the first WELS church, Salem, in Milwaukee, Wis. The WELS Historical Institute exists to preserve and present the history of WELS. It works closely with the synod archives, located at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. Learn more about the historical institute and the synod archives at wels.net/archives.

Chairman of WELS Christian Aid and Relief Rev. Robert Hein gave an overview of the type of assistance Christian Aid and Relief provides around the world, including relief following natural disasters and humanitarian aid that supports ministry efforts of world missions and congregations in North America. Christian Aid and Relief was able to grant \$466,212 for humanitarian aid in 2019 for projects such as digging boreholes for fresh water, literacy programs, and health clinics. Learn more about Christian Aid and Relief at wels.net/relief.

Rev. Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, spoke about trends in Congregation Mission Offerings. 2018 offerings totaled \$21.1 million, which was 0.7 percent below commitments and 1.2 percent below prior year receipts. 2019 subscriptions point to a decrease of 0.9 percent from 2018 actual offerings. “We thank the Lord and commend his people for these gifts and commitments,” said Lueneburg. He encouraged congregations, “When setting CMO, aim for ten percent of offerings. If at or above this goal, encourage your

congregation to maintain its generous support or consider increasing it as you’re able with God’s blessing.”

Rev. Jason Hacker, pastor at Grace, Waukesha, Wis., a board of directors member for the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG), began his presentation recognizing veterans and service members serving as delegates. The LMSG supports the needs of our military veterans and our military families of both active duty members and veterans, working closely with WELS Military Services. The goal of the LMSG is to have a liaison at every WELS congregation to provide resources and ideas to minister to service members. Learn more about the group at lutheranmilitary.org.

Speaking about the new hymnal project, Rev. Michael Schultz directed delegates to welshymnal.com for the latest updates on the project. He said 80 to 100 volunteers on 15 different committees are working on different aspects of the project. When completed, it won’t be just the hymnal, but encompass 18 different hard copy books for various elements and musical arrangements as well as worship planning software. The committee is planning to complete the new hymnal in time for Advent 2021. 

Delegates present reports and resolutions

Synod convention delegates concluded their work on Thursday morning by presenting, discussing, and approving reports and resolutions.

Floor committees began bringing their reports and resolutions to the convention floor on Wednesday morning. The first two resolutions were highly anticipated before the convention—resolutions to declare fellowship with the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya and the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church in Taiwan.

Delegates continued to support world mission work by designating the opening worship service offering of \$5,038 to WELS’ efforts for Hmong outreach in Vietnam. In addition, delegates approved a resolution encouraging congregations to schedule a mission festival, participate in a WELS Mission Journeys team, and to increase Congregation Mission Offerings to assist World Missions.

Teacher Jim Henrickson, chairman of the floor committee considering the work of the Commission on Lutheran Schools, presented two resolutions dealing with financial support for Lutheran Schools. The first resolution requests increased financial support for the 21st-Century Lutheran Principal Initiative, which helps to address the growing need for school leaders in WELS schools. The second resolution requests that the “Synodical Council give strong consideration to increased funding for the Commission on Lutheran Schools.” Delegates approved both resolutions.

Rev. Jay Bickelhaupt, chairman of the Conference of Presidents Floor Committee, presented a resolution titled “Encouraging education about the staff ministry program.” The resolution calls for the synod to publicize the staff ministry program more widely among local congregations

and schools and that “congregations looking to fill vacancies or seeking to expand ministry be informed by their district president about the benefits and availability of staff ministers.” Delegates approved this resolution.

Teacher Paul Scriver, chairman of the Constitutional Matters Floor Committee, was the first chairman to present on Thursday morning. Scriver read 17 resolutions dealing with bylaw revisions. These changes were all recommended either by the Synodical Council, the Conference of Presidents, or the Board for Ministerial Education. Delegates approved all 17 resolutions.

Delegates also approved a resolution encouraging WELS members to support Martin Luther College’s two-year campaign titled “Equipping Christian Witnesses.” The campaign is focused on increasing enrollment and student financial aid as well as improving student facilities.

The final resolution of the convention looked ahead to the next synod convention in 2021. Delegates resolved that the 66th biennial convention of WELS will be held at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

For a full list of all resolutions made at this convention, visit wels.net/2019synodconvention.

Did you know . . .

WELS has a Facebook page?
facebook.com/welslutherans

WELS has Twitter?
twitter.com/welstweets

WELS has Instagram?
instagram.com/welslutherans

**All convention documents and resources can be found at
wels.net/2019synodconvention.**