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Retirement Strategy Committee appointed

In November 2017, upon the request of the Synodical Council, President Mark Schroeder appointed an ad hoc committee to review the retirement program for WELS workers and to explore options to improve it.


WELS established a pension plan during the 1960s. The plan covers all called workers and is funded by individual calling bodies. During the past 25 years, a majority of pension plans offered by corporations and non-profit organizations in the United States have been replaced by 401K and 403B retirement plans. These changes in retirement programs reflect the changing needs of both organizations and their workers.

During fall 2017, the Synodical Council, with the encouragement of the Conference of Presidents, decided to form an ad hoc committee to study future options and to make a recommendation regarding the best way to provide retirement benefits for our called workers. That ad hoc committee was appointed in November; it includes representatives from the Synodical Council, the Conference

of Presidents, the Retirement Commission, and President Mark Schroeder, along with advisory members.

The group started its work shortly after it was formed and met in early January. The committee's assignment is to develop an informed recommendation on the future retirement program that most effectively serves the synod and its workers. The retirement program includes workers from our churches, schools, affiliated organizations, and the corporate synod.

"The objective of the committee's work is not to reduce or increase the overall dollars spent on worker retirement programs," says Mr. Paul Holzhueter, chairman of the Retirement Strategy Committee, "but to determine the most effective way for those dollars to be used in today's world. Options for future retirement programs will be evaluated from both the workers' position and from the synod's position."

Holzhueter also notes that future updates will be provided when there is additional information to be shared. 

TOGETHER



February 8, 2018

Conference of Presidents hold winter meeting

The Conference of Presidents (COP) held its winter meeting during the second week of January. Items discussed and decided include:

- The COP was informed of a request to WELS Christian Aid and Relief to provide a grant for and assistance to the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Puerto Rico as it recovers from last fall's hurricane. The grant would enable a disaster response coordinator to spend up to a year in Puerto Rico to work with the Puerto Rican pastors to identify and prioritize specific needs, plan construction and repair projects, and coordinate volunteer efforts. He would also help to coordinate continuing theological training for two men whose training was interrupted by the storm. The COP expressed support for this proposal. (The proposal was later approved by WELS Christian Aid and Relief.)
- The COP is working with the president's office to identify and track retired pastors who are willing to serve extended vacancies or to serve smaller congregations in a semi-retired capacity. Many retired pastors have already been serving in this way and have helped to reduce the impact of the high number of pastoral vacancies in the synod.
- Five pastors from other denominations have either requested colloquy or begun the process. (The colloquy process is a lengthy and involved process that determines whether a pastor or teacher from another synod can be received into our synod and serve in the ministry.)
- There are 117 pastoral vacancies, with 97 of those in parish pastor positions. It was encouraging that this number has only grown by three since last October.
- The COP approved a request from WELS Canada that seminary graduates assigned to Canada be given the opportunity to accept or decline the assignment, as is done in the case of world mission calls.
- The COP approved a recommendation from Congregational Services that the Commission on Adult Discipleship and the Commission on Youth and Family be combined into a single Commission on Discipleship. Rev. Donn Dobberstein, who currently serves as director of both commissions, would be the director of the combined group.
- The COP approved a proposal to reduce the size of the printed Report to the Twelve Districts by publishing about two-thirds of the reports electronically. The date for distribution of the material would not change from previous practice.



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- The COP appointed Rev. Joel Nitz to serve on the Support Committee.
- The district presidents and circuit pastors were encouraged to work closely with congregations in remote locations and with congregations that are not able to support a full-time pastor to ensure that their pastoral needs are being met. The COP also encourages Congregational Services to continue its plans to provide worship materials and other resources for such congregations.
- The COP continued its discussions on the workload levels of district presidents in large districts. A committee will be looking at options to provide appropriate assistance.
- The COP scheduled October 21 as the synodwide Mission and Ministry Sunday. Congregations are encouraged to place this on their calendars. Materials will be provided to assist congregations in their planning.
- The COP expressed thanks to God and to our members that Congregation Mission Offerings for calendar year 2017 finished at \$21,358,000, an increase of \$298,000 or 1.4 percent over 2016 receipts. Actual results were also greater than subscriptions by \$138,000 or 0.7 percent.

Serving in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder 

Celebrating WELS Missions

On Sunday, Jan. 28, St. John, Jefferson, Wis., celebrated WELS World Missions by hosting a church mission festival and corresponding school cultural fair.

Rev. Tim Dolan, chairman of the Native American Administrative Committee for WELS World Missions, preached two mission festival services and gave a presentation about Apache mission work during Bible class. Activities moved across the street to St. John's elementary school after the second service, where a cultural fair then took place.


Principal Peter Lemke, who organized the fair, has a personal connection

to WELS Missions: "When I was a young child my father accepted a call to teach at East Fork Lutheran High School, located on the Apache Indian Reservation, where we lived for seven years. I was also blessed to visit our missions in Malawi and Zambia when my parents served as missionaries there. Once you personally experience this work, you can't help but come away with a better understanding of the need to continue mission work. It is truly a life changing experience."

In an effort to include parents in the learning experience, each family worked together to create a display from one of the countries where WELS is currently conducting mission work or is in fellowship with a sister church body. "Passports" were handed out at the door to encourage everyone to visit other displays to

receive a sticker for their books. The children sang songs in different languages, and each family brought a potluck dish specific to their country.

Kinsley, a first-grader at St. John's, was excited to share about her world mission field. She noted, "I learned that missionaries in Mexico sometimes have to communicate through the Internet to share Jesus with other people. It was super fun to work on my project with my mom and dad!" Megan, mom to a second-grader, was also impressed with the event. "This project was a great way to not only learn with my kids but open my eyes to all of the mission work our church body is actually doing."

For an event guide to host a cultural fair along with your next mission festival, visit the WELS Missions Resource Center. To request a mission speaker for your event, visit wels.net/speaker-request. In addition to mission festivals and cultural fairs, mission speakers are also available for school assemblies, women's and men's conferences, and Lutheran Women's Missionary Society rallies. 

Plans underway for long-term relief strategy in Puerto Rico

WELS Christian Aid and Relief has announced its plan to call a disaster response coordinator for Puerto Rico who would serve for one year and work with the national pastors of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Puerto Rico to identify and prioritize specific needs,

plan construction and repair projects, and coordinate volunteer efforts. He would also help to coordinate continuing theological training for two men whose training was interrupted by Hurricane Maria last fall.

The decision was made after President Mark Schroeder, World Mission Administrator Rev. Larry Schlomer, Director of Missions Operations Mr. Sean Young, and Rev. Tim Satorius, WELS Liaison to Puerto Rico, went to Puerto Rico in January to meet with national leaders and discuss further the most effective ways Christian Aid and Relief could help the hurricane-devastated island. Christian Aid and Relief approved the Puerto Rican church leaders' request to engage a Spanish-speaking WELS pastor for one year.

This pastor will help coordinate the logistics of rebuilding the church in Humacao that was taken out by the hurricane and repairing the damages to the church building in Guayama. He will also oversee the relief efforts of WELS resources and volunteers in Puerto Rico. Finally, he will encourage and guide two young men in their pastoral training so they can lead these churches into the future.

Schlomer says, "The whole country is in a recovery mode. The leaders of the church have other jobs and have their hands full with the spiritual care of the members. This missionary would be able to spend time on the many logistical questions that will be needed in rebuilding and repairing. He will also be able to quicken the pace of training for the two young men that the church in Puerto Rico have chosen as leaders."