


media," says Mr. Tom Kuster, executive director of the Christ in Media Institute, which hosts the conference, "but we highlight other media as well." He shares that media really is whatever channel carries the message from the speaker to the audience.

Kuster says the goal of the conference is to "tickle people's awareness" of innovative ways of using different media so they start thinking how they can get involved in outreach, no matter what their skill set or vocation. A secondary goal is to connect people with mutual interests for future collaboration on gospel-outreach projects.

This is the seventh annual GOWM conference hosted by Christ in Media Institute. The institute started in 2009 as an educational arm of Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn., to promote research and education focused on employing God's gift of mass media to bring the pure gospel message to vast audiences in the U.S. and abroad. It is a part of WELS' sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Anyone can participate in this free online conference. Presentations are available to read or watch; online discussion will be open until Nov. 8 before the conference closes and is archived. Past conference presentations are always available.

Participate now at gowm.org. 

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TOGETHER



October 19, 2021

An update from Vietnam

WELS Director of Missions Operations Mr. Sean Young just returned from a month-long visit to Vietnam to discuss next steps for the theological education center in Hanoi. Hmong Asia Ministry Coordinator Rev. Bounkeo Lor accompanied him. The Board for World Missions released this report about the trip:


From the beginning of this initiative, WELS has known that that there would be potential challenges and unexpected setbacks due to this being a brand new mission field in an unfamiliar country. COVID also complicated the process, but we're thankful that the Lord continues to guide these efforts and "work all things for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28).

This was the first visit to Vietnam since COVID-19 shut down international travel in March 2020. Certain conversations and building plan discussions were held via Zoom, but concrete plans for the next steps needed to be discussed in-person. Conversations with the Hmong Fellowship Church leadership went well and continue at the time of this writing. If all goes as planned, it is WELS World Missions' goal to have the theological education center open by Easter 2022, pending no other COVID-19 complications.

Rev. Dr. Terry Schultz from Multi-Language Productions and Rev. Ger Lor from Grace Hmong Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Kan., accompanied Rev. Bounkeo Lor and Mr. Sean Young on the trip. Schultz trained Hmong Fellowship Church leaders how to use evangelism materials he created to train their members, and he gained valuable insight into the Hmong culture for the creation of future materials. Multi-Language Productions will be purchasing flip-book versions of these visual teaching aids. They also identified three Hmong Fellowship Church students with drawing skills who potentially could help develop future educational resources.

In the meantime, the second wave of visiting professors are currently in Vietnam to have their religious visas renewed/approved and conduct training. Rev. Joel Nitz is there for the first time since being called to serve the Hmong in Vietnam in February 2020. Training continues, in-person (thank the Lord!) and via Zoom, for the first 60 men who will prayerfully be ordained as pastors. These men also continue to lead rural training workshops throughout the 13 districts to share what they are learning with other Hmong Fellowship Church members.

The Hmong Fellowship Church grew by 12,000 people in 2020, and the church body now numbers 138,000 members. Stay updated on progress and learn more about Hmong outreach in Vietnam at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.

Serving with you in Christ,
President Mark Schroeder 



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


Conference of Presidents Fall 2021 meeting

At its October meeting, the Conference of Presidents (COP) received and discussed the following reports and topics:

- Mr. Bill Ziche, president of Northwestern Publishing House (NPH), provided an update on the new hymnal. Already 325 churches have placed orders for the hymnal, a pace that NPH considers encouraging. NPH is also in the early stages of developing a new religion curriculum for pre-school through high school.
- President Richard Gurgel of Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., provided an overview of the strategic planning effort that has already begun at MLC.
- WELS Benefit Plans director Mr. Josh Peterman provided an overview of the materials that will be used to introduce the new retirement plan to congregations and called workers. The change in the retirement plan takes effect on Jan. 1, 2022.
- There are 136 vacancies in pastor-trained positions. This includes positions in world missions, schools, and administration.
- The COP discussed the issue of called and hired workers in our early childhood ministries. More study will take place on developing principles and guidelines for congregations to consider as they staff these schools.
- The COP formally expressed thanks to the members of the WELS Hymnal Project for their many years of faithful service.

- The COP resolved that the on-campus requirement for staff ministry certification be the same as the practice now in place for teacher certification. As is the case with teachers, someone enrolled in the staff ministry certification program and serving in a call will be considered provisionally ministry certified.

Work continues to clarify the synod bylaws dealing with the discipline and appeal process for called workers.

The next COP meeting takes place in January. 

New and upcoming Prison Ministry resources

WELS Prison Ministry works to reach those impacted by incarceration with the saving message of God's grace. It does this through a vigorous ministry-by-mail program that has two components. One is mailing Bible studies to inmates that include a test to complete and mail back; it then gets reviewed by volunteers and sent back with words of encouragement. The other is an active pen pal program, composed of WELS volunteers who correspond with inmates via letters to share Christ's love.

In addition to reaching the incarcerated, WELS Prison Ministry also seeks to equip members and congregations to help those who have been released from prison or jail. Through the faithful and generous support from WELS members in addition to a generous grant, Prison Ministry has a range of resources that were recently released or are in the planning stages.

Mentoring a Returning Citizen is a video-based training resource that helps church leaders prepare their members to mentor people returning to the community from incarceration. It can be found at welscongregationalervices.net/mentoring-a-returning-citizen.

Two resources to help promote awareness of Prison Ministry's work are also available. Worship planning resources for a Prison Ministry Sunday include suggested hymns, psalm, and prayers together with a sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:16,17. A few stories and comments from inmates who have benefited from Prison Ministry's Bible studies are included at the end of the sermon sheet.

A Sunday school/Lutheran elementary school lesson based on Onesimus and Philemon emphasizes the importance of welcoming those with troubled backgrounds into God's family. The lesson contains student and leader sheets for four grade levels (PreK- Grade 6). These resources can be found online at welscongregationalervices.net/prison-ministry-awareness.

Looking ahead, the WELS Prison Ministry committee is examining ways to reach inmates as communication methods change. "Methods used to deliver the gospel to inmates are changing. Inmates are communicating less frequently via U.S. Mail. More inmates are being given access to electronic communication (similar to e-mail) as well as other services such as book or music downloads to tablets that the inmates own. Our ministry needs to adapt to this new environment. Frequent opportunities to share law and gospel with many more inmates nationwide are

available if we can adapt our efforts to this new reality," explains Mr. Dave Hochmuth, WELS Prison Ministry administrator.

There are three components to this new effort:

- Produce devotions that support outreach to people with little if any biblical knowledge.
- Implement a system for distributing the devotions using electronic messaging services to inmates.
- Test and implement a system using electronic messaging services to collect Bible study tests, return corrected tests, and exchange pen pal letters with inmates.

Hochmuth says, "With changes in the environment of our ministry, we are grateful that the Lord continues to provide generous gifts from donors and organizations to meet the new opportunities for outreach right now."

Learn how to support or get involved with WELS Prison Ministry at wels.net/prison-ministry. 

Free conference highlights innovative gospel outreach with media

The Gospel Outreach With Media (GOWM) online conference opened Monday, Oct. 18.

Presentations in this international three-week conference highlight various types of media—including stained-glass windows, virtual reality, the creative visual arts, toys, and the Internet—and how they can be used to spread the gospel.

"People normally think about technology when talking about