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## Conference of Presidents spring meeting

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**T**he Conference of Presidents (COP) met for its spring meeting April 8-9. Here are some of the items they discussed or decided:

- Three new COP members were chosen as COP representatives on the Synodical Council (SC). Pastor Joel Heckendorf (Arizona-California), Pastor Michael Seifert (North Atlantic), and Pastor Dennis Klatt (Minnesota) will attend their first SC meeting in November.
- The COP spent time preparing for the upcoming assignment days at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., and Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., in May. They will be facing the continuing challenge of a shortage of called workers. The number of teacher candidates at MLC is smaller than in recent years. The class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is the largest in several years. The candidates are all blessings from God and will reduce—but not eliminate—the many vacancies in congregations and schools. The COP continues to encourage all members to help recruit future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.
- The COP proposed a standardized interview process and supporting evaluation tools for district presidents to use in carrying out a review of someone in pastoral, teaching, or staff ministry seeking re-entry into the ministry. The process is intended to seek increased clarity, consistency, and communication in the process.
- The COP currently grants provisional minister of the gospel status to called teachers who enroll in MLC's Teaching Ministry Certification program (a program pursued by individuals who already hold an accredited teaching degree). MLC now offers online degree programs that include both professional training and the full set of ministry certification requirements. The COP monitors these programs.
- The COP discussed the importance of maintaining a "living" procedural document for COP use entitled "Divine Call Policies—Procedures—Guidelines."
- The COP received a number of reports from Congregational Services, highlighting record levels of adult confirmation and efforts to reduce backdoor membership losses. A complete analysis of congregational statistics, along with a summary, will be released later this spring.

- Pastor Kurt Lueneburg will be retiring this summer as the director of the Ministry of Christian Giving. The COP thanked him for his 21 years of Christian giving experience. Calling for his replacement will take place later this spring.
- Total Congregation Mission Offering subscriptions for 2026 surpassed actual giving in 2025 (although it did not keep up with inflation).
- The COP will lead training for district constitution committees in light of differing governance models being considered by congregations.

This was the last regular meeting of the COP for four district presidents as they will be completing their time of service as district presidents at the district conventions this summer. Pastor Donald Patterson (South Central) has accepted a call, Pastor Charles Westra (South Atlantic) is not seeking reelection, and Pastors Joel Zank (Northern Wisconsin) and Douglas Free (Dakota-Montana) are retiring. We pray for God's continued blessings and thank them for their service.

With new district presidents to be elected this summer, the COP will experience significant changes in its membership. We pray for God's blessings as those conventions elect their leaders.

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

## Storm update

Over the past week, severe weather in the Midwest has impacted many WELS congregations as well as their members and neighbors.

Pastor Dan Sims, director, WELS Christian Aid and Relief, is in contact with area district presidents and is assessing the damage in the flooded areas. One of these is New London, Wis., where Emanuel Lutheran Church and School is located.

Once needs are determined, WELS Christian Aid and Relief may issue a call for volunteers for a New London deployment. To be a volunteer, you must be registered via the WELS Disaster Relief website. Registered volunteers will receive more details regarding deployment.

Additionally, monetary donations are being collected for those impacted throughout the Midwest. Donations can be made online to Christian Aid and Relief. Checks can also be mailed to: WELS CMM, Attn: Christian Aid and Relief, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha, WI 53188.

Check out [wels.net/relief](https://wels.net/relief) for continuing updates. 

## Women in world mission fields gather for support and encouragement

Under the theme "Rest," the conference included worship, devotions, Bible studies, and free time for fellowship. Guest speaker Don


Patterson, WELS' South Central district president, developed Bible studies to help the women find "Joy in the Journey."



"Every part of the conference was planned with the idea of missionary wives connecting with God's Word and each other," says Linda Marquardt, who serves alongside her husband in the Asia-Oceania region. "My favorite part was seeing missionary wives from different countries connecting, having meaningful conversations, praying with each other, and forming lasting friendships."

Those connections are important as these women deal with the unique situations that occur when living in a mission field, including learning the local languages and customs, discovering their own vocation in their distinct setting, and finding creative ways to connect with faraway family.

"A handful of the attendees are called to serve in public mission roles, but all are the unsung heroes of the work we carry out," says Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. "In unique overseas settings, they learn how to live out their faith and carry out personal ministry, often in quiet and unseen ways. At the same time, they give up US careers and familiar school systems for their children and manage homes in places where it can feel like all the rules have changed, serving in so many ways as the backbone of mission work around the world."

Started in 2017, this conference occurs once every three years. "Before having these conferences, we might know the few other missionary wives in our region or meet some others at Lutheran Women's Missionary Society conventions, but now we have friendships with other sisters in Christ around the world," says Marquardt.

Between the conferences, missionary wives continue to support and encourage one another in monthly Zoom meetings. 

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