

January 18, 2022

## Conference of Presidents January 2022

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**T**he Conference of Presidents (COP) held its winter meeting on Jan. 3-6. The following items were discussed or decided:

- Representatives from the Conference of Presidents will meet with the Board for Home Missions leadership and with several members of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty as a part of the planning process for the effort to open 100 new home missions in ten years beginning in 2023.
- Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) is continuing its search for a new president. Mr. Bill Ziche, current NPH president, has announced his plans to retire. Mr. Mark Buske, director of marketing for NPH, will serve as acting president until a new president is found.
- There are currently 143 pastoral vacancies in the synod, 124 of which are parish pastor positions. Forty of the pastoral vacancies are in associate pastor positions (meaning those congregations are still being served by at least one pastor). Next year's graduating class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary will be larger than those in recent years, which will help to reduce the number of pastoral vacancies.
- With expanding enrollment at our WELS schools, the growing shortage of teachers continues, especially in the area of early childhood. The COP discussed ideas for enhancing recruitment efforts.
- The COP recently issued a pastoral letter on Christian freedom.
- The overall cost of the vicar program is \$42,000 per vicar, down slightly from last year. The vicar stipend was increased by \$25 per month to \$1750. Vicar compensation also provides for housing most of the cost of health insurance.
- The COP expressed thanks to God for the high level of Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) in 2021. The exact total will be published in the coming days.
- Congregations are asked to submit their 2021 statistics and CMO subscriptions by the Feb. 4 deadline.
- The COP expressed its support for a proposal by Northwestern Publishing House and the Commission on Lutheran Schools to develop a comprehensive K-12 religion curriculum for schools and Sunday schools.
- The COP has been making final edits on the restatement of the synod's teaching on male and female roles. It is hoped that the final document will be ready for review by the district conventions this summer.

## Increased school enrollments offer new opportunities for outreach

Enrollment in WELS schools is up 9.8 percent this school year (8 percent for Lutheran elementary schools alone), according to the recently released 2021–22 school statistics, with 26,586 students in 282 Lutheran elementary schools and 11,672 students in 363 early childhood ministries.

This is the highest ever recorded enrollment for WELS early childhood ministries and the highest number for Lutheran elementary schools since the 2004–05 school year, according to Mr. Jim Rademan, director of WELS Lutheran Schools.

About 70 percent of WELS schools increased their enrollment this year, while 25 percent decreased and about 5 percent stayed the same.

Besides enrollment increasing, schools are seeing more opportunities for outreach. More and more students attending WELS schools are mission prospects, with nearly 33 percent of families in early childhood ministries and 16 percent in Lutheran elementary schools identifying either as non-Christian or no church home.

“Enrollment is up in our schools,” says Rademan. “Now how can we take advantage of the opportunity? Conditions have been favorable for having more students sit at the feet of Jesus in our classrooms. But how long will that window be open and how well are we going to take advantage of that open window and be as urgent and resolute as we possibly can about sharing the gospel with those children and their families?”

To help congregations and schools connect with unchurched school families, WELS Congregational Services offers a workshop called *Telling the Next Generation: Utilizing our Schools for Outreach*. Available in person for groups of congregations or a single congregation or virtually for single congregations, the workshop provides resources and advice to help congregations develop outreach plans and strategies to share the gospel with school families.

Learn more about *Telling the Next Generation*. 

## God’s work among us and through us

“Your gifts, God’s blessings: An annual report to our members” is now available online. The report includes photos of Christian brothers and sisters around the world, stories of faith, and updates on WELS’ ministry.

“This report reviews some of the many ways that God has blessed his work among us,” says WELS President Mark Schroeder. “As you read about them, join with the psalm writer in singing, ‘Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory, for your love and faithfulness!’”

Read more about

- Zach Satorius, a seminary student studying in Medellín, Colombia, during his vicar year;
- Arturo and Maricruz Navarette, who sold their living room furniture and purchased chairs, tables, and a coffeemaker so they can host a new church group in their home in Mexico City, Mexico;

- the help Christian Aid and Relief offered in New Orleans, La., following damage from Hurricane Ida; and
- the many resources available for congregations as they begin to use the new *Christian Worship: Hymnal*.

These stories and more are presented in the 2022 edition of “Your gifts, God’s blessings.” Print versions of the report are being sent to every WELS congregation and individual donor. Additional print versions are available from Northwestern Publishing House for free. Visit [nph.net](http://nph.net) or call 800-662-6022.

To view the report online, visit [wels.net/annualreport](http://wels.net/annualreport). There you can also download a PowerPoint presentation of the report with notes that allow anyone to share the highlights of our synod’s work. Alternatively, churches can invite a WELS Christian giving counselor to give the presentation. Contact WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for more information. 



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