

March 7, 2023

2023 synod convention planning underway

Every two years, our synod holds its synod convention. This year the convention will meet at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Mich., July 31–August 3. The theme of the convention is “Embrace the Cross—Anticipate the Crown.” Planning for the convention has already begun.

Rev. Phil Hirsch, president of the Nebraska District, will deliver the essay that expands on and articulates the convention theme. Rev. James Huebner, first vice president of the synod, will preach for opening worship.

One high point of the convention will be the declaration of fellowship with the Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda. This declaration of fellowship is possible because in-depth doctrinal discussions over the past several years have shown that our two synods are united in biblical doctrine and in our adherence to the Lutheran Confessions. Rev. Musa Makisimu, president of the Obadiah Lutheran Synod, will give a presentation to familiarize delegates with his synod's history and ministry.


Another high point will be the public affirmation of fellowship between WELS and *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*. This is a newly formed synod in Latin America, comprised of a merger of national churches that have already been in fellowship in WELS. (That's why fellowship is being “affirmed” rather than “declared.”) In the future, new house churches forming out of *Academia Cristo* efforts also will be joining this synod. Rev. Tonny Quintero,

secretary of the governing board of his synod, will address the delegates and give a presentation describing *Iglesia Cristo WELS Internacional*.

This convention will feature elections for the offices of synod president and second vice president. Other elections will be held to determine membership on various synod boards and commissions.

About 400 voting delegates from around the country will attend the convention. Roughly half of the delegates are lay members while the other half are pastors, teachers, and staff ministers. The convention will also be attended by advisory delegates from the Synodical Council, the Conference of Presidents, and various areas of ministry. All voting delegates will be assigned to a floor committee. Each floor committee deals with a specific part of the synod's mission and ministry and brings reports and resolutions to the convention for action. Memorials, which are calls for action on specific topics, will be assigned to the appropriate floor committee for discussion and recommendations.

All business to be considered by the convention will be published in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BORAM). The BORAM will be available on the convention website, **welsconvention.net**, by May 5, and all delegates and WELS congregations will receive hard copies by the end of May.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Connecting people to the gospel


“I would use the illustration of a switchboard operator from the early days of telephone communication to explain the work of a diaspora ministry facilitator,” says Rev. Neil Birkholz, WELS’ Asian ministry consultant and diaspora ministry facilitator for East Asia. “When an inquiry from my designated people group comes to me directly or to someone else in WELS, I become the middleman/operator and connect them to the right person.”

Birkholz further explains, “If someone from Korea is looking to connect their son with a WELS church in the United States, I help connect them with the local WELS church where their son will be living. If a member of my WELS church in California is returning to their home country of Thailand, I help connect them with our WELS World Mission One Team in Thailand so this member can continue to worship with other confessional Lutherans while living in Thailand.”

The role of diaspora ministry facilitator is a new one. As globalization has increased, so have global migration rates, which has opened up new mission opportunities for WELS churches. Diaspora ministry—or people group ministry—is coordinated by Joint Missions because it involves both World Missions and Home Missions. Each World Missions One Team (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Native American) has at least one diaspora ministry facilitator, which is a role that a pastor takes on in addition to his full-time call. These facilitators have experience serving the people group with which they are working and stay

in touch with the World Missions One Team for their area.

“Diaspora ministry certainly makes the world feel a lot smaller,” says Rev. Aaron Bublitz, pastor at Heritage, Gilbert, Ariz., and the diaspora ministry facilitator for Africa. “Our WELS congregations have opportunities to connect to and share the gospel with people who have come here from all over the world. We then have the opportunity to connect to and share the gospel through them in many places in the world. We are helping facilitate the Great Commission we have been given to take the gospel to all nations.”

Learn more at wels.net/jointmissions, including how to contact diaspora ministry facilitators to connect people groups. 

Helping the Hurting with Hope: A new Bible study


WELS Special Ministries is introducing a new Bible study for congregational or small group use. “Helping the Hurting with Hope” was written to help participants appreciate the role of compassion in a Christian’s personal and congregational life, providing gospel motivation for participants to go beyond their comfort zones and act in compassionate ways through the Spirit’s power.

“We hope that the five-lesson study will give congregations an opportunity to discuss the best way to respond to broken people,” says Rev. Jim Behringer, director of WELS Special Ministries. “We hope members will rejoice when the Lord brings them into contact with people who need

the Lord and work patiently and persistently to help them and connect them with Jesus.”

Behringer explains that where the Bible class succeeds in cultivating compassion, congregations will be better spiritual refuges for people with broken lives and welcome people looking for a church family where they can walk a new path after release from prison, or in recovery from addiction, or after a public fall into sin.

“WELS Prison Ministry has been successful in reaching the incarcerated with the Word of God, but when people who were in prison are released and look for a church family, some churches are very reluctant to work with returning citizens. Pregnancy counseling centers have experienced that their clients have a hard time finding a church family in a local church because they feel the stigma of disapproval of their past sins,” Behringer says, “When you recognize that someone is a sinner, rejoice to see them at church and encourage them to keep coming. Help them take the baby steps needed to start building a life in Christ.”

The Bible study is available for free online at [welscongregationservices.net/helping-the-hurting-with-hope](http://welscongregationalservices.net/helping-the-hurting-with-hope). Learn more about WELS Special Ministries at wels.net/special-ministries. 

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