

TOGETHER



November 15, 2022

Visit to Kenya and Ethiopia

TAlong with Rev. Larry Schlomer, WELS World Missions administrator, and Missionary Howard Mohlke, head of the WELS One Africa Team, I was privileged to visit two of our sister synods in Africa in October. The experience is one I will never forget.

The first visit took place in Nairobi, Kenya. There we were greeted at the airport by representatives of the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ–Kenya (LCMC–Kenya). The LCMC–Kenya was received into fellowship with WELS at our synod convention in 2021.


We had the opportunity to worship in the new partially constructed church building (made possible by the generous support of WELS members). We spent the next two days attending the synod convention of the LCMC–Kenya. The faith, zeal, and commitment of the pastors and laypeople attending the convention were truly moving. In the days after the convention, we visited several congregations where members themselves are erecting new church buildings.

Later in the week we traveled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. There we were greeted by Dr. Kebede Yigezu, the president of the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia (LCE). The LCE is also a relatively new sister synod of WELS, with fellowship declared at our synod convention in 2017.

One of the priorities of the LCE is Christian education on all levels. In a building in Bishoftu (also made possible by the generous gifts of WELS members), Dr. Kebede operates a school where three levels of theological training take place. We were privileged to attend the graduation of four men who had completed their training in one of the levels and are now ready to begin seminary training.

With his emphasis on Christian education, Dr. Kebede also has permission from the local government in Dukem to operate a Lutheran elementary school there. It will have an enrollment of 900 by next year. We visited the school at the start of the school day and were impressed by the enthusiasm of the students and the commitment of the teachers.

God is blessing the gospel ministries of these two growing sister synods. Your prayers and offerings have been a special blessing to them.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Synodical Council holds its fall 2022 meeting

The Synodical Council (SC) held its fall meeting on Nov. 4-5, 2022. Four new members were welcomed: Mr. Brent Nemmers (South Central District lay representative), Mr. Chris Kestner (Michigan District lay representative), Rev. Phil Hirsch (Conference of Presidents representative), and Rev. Jonathan Schroeder (chairman of the Board for World Missions).

The SC reviewed the 2021-2022 financial results of the synod and its subsidiaries. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) totaled \$23.1 million, the first time that CMO has exceeded the \$23 million level. That compares to \$22.6 million in the previous year and is an increase of 2.2%. These higher-than-planned CMO receipts, coupled with underspending by areas of ministry, enabled the synod to end the fiscal year in solid financial shape. Synodical subsidiaries (WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Investment Fund, WELS Foundation, Northwestern Publishing House) all reported strong financial results for the year.

For the first quarter of the current fiscal year, CMO support remains strong (4.3% higher than the previous year). Expenses are in line with the adopted plan.

The SC approved the first draft of the ministry financial plan (budget) for the 2023–2025 biennium. The proposed plan outlines planned synod support of \$32,841,000 in the first year of the biennium and \$33,742,000 in the second year. These are increases of 4.3% and 2.67%, respectively. Compensation for called and hired workers will increase by 2.5% in each year of the biennium. CMO expectations for the

next biennium are expected to exceed \$23 million in each year, continuing to remain above historic levels. The SC will revisit the ministry financial plan (including proposed compensation levels) in February 2023 and will make adjustments if the financial situation changes. Once the plan is adopted in February, it will be forwarded to the synod convention in July 2023 for consideration.

The SC set the new relocation reimbursement rate. Since moving expenses are taxable for all workers, lay workers will be reimbursed at a rate of 19.65% of the moving cost and called workers will be reimbursed at a rate of 27.3% of the moving cost. These rates assure that workers are reimbursed for additional taxes they may incur. All calling bodies are encouraged to follow this policy.

The SC approved a change to the compensation guidelines, encouraging calling bodies to review annually cash housing allowances for called workers who rent. This change was made because of the rapidly rising cost of renting.

The SC received progress reports from the ministerial schools regarding potential construction needs on the campuses. Master campus planning and feasibility studies are taking place at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

The SC discussed a proposal that was submitted to the Conference of Presidents for consideration. The proposal is to change the synod convention from a biennial to a triennial convention. As was the case with the Conference of Presidents, the SC discussed both the pros and the cons of

such a change. Such a change requires an amendment to the synod constitution (not just the bylaws). This means that if the COP decides to forward this proposal to the synod convention in 2023, it would need to be approved by the 2023 convention and discussed at 2024 district conventions, with final consideration happening at the 2025 convention. The COP will determine what to do with this proposal when it meets in January 2023.

The SC received an update on the work being done to develop the next long-range strategic plan for the synod. It's expected that the final plan will be considered by the 2023 synod convention. ☩

Growth and partnership in Indonesia

In July 2022, WELS Friendly Counselor Rev. Gregory Bey made his first visit to Indonesia since the pandemic began. Bey attended the convention of WELS' sister synod in Indonesia, Gereja Lutheran Indonesia (GLI). GLI currently has about 1,650 members in 29 congregations served by 30 pastors and 5 vicars.

The GLI convention was held on the new seminary campus on the island of Java. Construction of this seminary, called Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Lutheran (STTL), was completed in 2021. Seminary classes are taught by Indonesian pastors with support from Bey. The seminary currently has 27 students, many of whom are graduates of a Lutheran high school that was established in July 2018.

"Walking through the new campus evoked emotions of exhilaration and excitement coupled with thankfulness to God for this beautiful blessing," says Bey. "But it was interacting with the students, staff, and faculty that brought to mind these words of St. Paul: 'Entrust the things you heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, to faithful men who will also be able to teach others' " (2 Timothy 2:2 Evangelical Heritage Version).

Bey concludes: "God-willing, STTL will produce a steady stream of qualified national pastors for many years to come."

GLI continues to grow in number and maturity. In 2015, a plan was set in motion to transition a significant amount of financial support from WELS to GLI. Pastor salaries for men in established congregations will, prayerfully, be fully supported by local members by 2025. In some cases, GLI pastors may need to serve as "tent ministers" who support themselves with secular jobs. WELS would continue to provide funding for seminary professors and possibly the synod chairman. Savings could then be used to support building projects for existing churches as well as exploratory work in new regions. This is a huge step toward self-sufficiency and independence as a stand-alone church body.

WELS' Asia One Team is in the process of calling for a full-time friendly counselor to support and advise the work in Indonesia. Bey has been filling the role on a quarter-time basis since he retired from full-time work in 2019.

Learn more at wels.net/indonesia. ☩



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