

TOGETHER

February 7, 2023

Update on the Ukrainian Lutheran Church

The situation in Ukraine remains very challenging and difficult for our brothers and sisters of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC). Rev. Roger Neumann serves as the WELS liaison to the ULC and is in almost daily contact with Bishop Vyacheslav Horpynchuk, the head of the ULC. Neumann provides regular updates with information provided by Horpynchuk.

Horpynchuk often reports of the situation on the ground in Ukraine. Heavy shelling of populated areas continues. Even though there are widespread power outages and a lack of heat and sometimes even water, the congregations of the ULC continue to meet for worship (dressed in winter clothing) whenever possible. Pastors continue to be faithful to their callings by preaching, teaching, calling on members, and distributing food and medicine to their members, refugees, and communities. Many members have had to flee from their hometowns, but those people are often served by pastors in congregations where the danger is less intense.

Even when it seems safe, often it is not. Last Sunday one worship service was interrupted by a shell that fell 800 meters from the church, shaking the building and breaking some windows. Members in Kiev try to go about their normal life, using public transportation to travel. But when an air raid siren sounds, all public transportation stops. Subways can be stopped for two or more hours. Sometimes people need to

remain in bomb shelters for up to seven hours. At night, when missile strikes shake their apartments, they wake up in fear and anxiety, wondering when the next missile will hit. Whenever families are separated by work, school, or buying groceries, they are in constant fear for one another's safety. Yet they are quick to confess that they believe that the Lord will watch over them and that they await an enduring kingdom that is secured by our Lord Jesus, a kingdom where they will be safe eternally.

Plans for new church buildings have been put on hold, but there is every intention to continue those projects when the war is over. In the meantime, even small temporary places of worship become places of refuge and comfort as God's Word is preached and his promises proclaimed.

Because of your generous gifts, WELS continues to provide financial support to the ULC. The pastors and people are using those funds carefully and wisely, providing food, clothing, medicine, and transportation to those who need it. Thank you for your generous gifts!

Please continue to keep our brothers and sisters in your prayers. Thank God that they continue to worship and hear his Word. Thank God that he has kept them safe. Pray that God would continue to bless them with his loving protection and that peace will soon be restored throughout Ukraine.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

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Training the next generation of leaders

For the first time, WELS high school students were specially invited to attend the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership in Chicago this past January. Sixty-one teenagers from ten area Lutheran high schools attended keynotes and breakout sessions, participated in mixers, and went to Navy Pier for an evening of teen-only fun and fellowship. One of the breakout sessions even featured a panel of high school students discussing their experiences and views.

“[Our church body] is hemorrhaging young adults, and you often hear people my age (or even older) speculating on why that is the case. So we wanted to have some presentations where we actually listened to young people,” says Rev. Jonathan Hein, convention coordinator and coordinator of WELS Congregational Services. “What are their views on why their generation is quitting church? What do they think we can do better to attempt to retain and reach young people today?”

He continues, “It was one of the most highly attended breakouts. In my work, I hear a lot of young people who say that they don’t really have much of a voice. They certainly had one at the conference.”

Natalie Hatzung, a student at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis., was one of the teen panelists. “After we spoke, I heard so many compliments and so much appreciation,” she says. “People were coming up to me who had no idea who I am—they just noticed I’m a teen, and they said, ‘Thank you for

being here.’ Parents and teachers came up [to me] and said, ‘This is really eye-opening. I appreciate your input.’ ”

The fact that so many adults cared deeply about their input and experience left a huge impression on this next generation of Lutheran leaders. WELS teens desire to be respected and valued by the adults in their lives. Hein adds, “They want to have a role to play. . . . They want to be more than consumers of gospel ministry. They want to be doers of gospel ministry.” The conference exposed them to some of the very real conversations happening in the synod surrounding leadership, ministry, and outreach.

On the final day of the conference, Rev. Phil Huebner, campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, gathered the high school attendees together for a closing discussion about the conference. Favorite moments included the trip to Navy Pier, worshiping and communing with more than one thousand other WELS members, meeting teens from other schools, and engaging in conversation with the adults in attendance.

What was abundantly clear from that discussion is that these young people are compassionate and enthusiastic, with hearts for sharing the gospel. Moreover, many were open and vulnerable enough to reveal that they’re also nervous about the impact college might have on their faith.

But as Huebner explains, by inviting teens to this conference, we are showing them that they matter. We are making an effort “not just to talk about teens but rather include them and train up the next generation of leaders,” he says. ☪

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