

June 20, 2023

## Two important gatherings

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**O**ur sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), is meeting this week at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn., for its 106th annual convention. The convention began last Sunday and will conclude on Thursday.

The theme of the ELS convention is "We Are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made." A theological essay with that title will be presented by Rev. Aaron Hamilton of Scottsdale, Ariz. The delegates will hear reports on world and home outreach efforts, doctrinal matters, and education programs. The convention will elect officers and discuss financial matters.

A special event will be the dedication of a new ELS Military Monument on the campus of Bethany Lutheran College.


We pray that the Lord will bless the convention and thank God for our continuing fellowship.

Later this week, beginning on Thursday, the 60th annual convention of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) will be held in La Crosse, Wis.

LWMS includes members from throughout the synod. The purpose of the organization is to increase mission awareness among WELS members, encourage congregations to become directly involved in mission efforts, and provide generous support for home and world missions and for missionaries and their families.

The convention itself, attended by both men and women, features worship, fellowship, and multiple presentations by world and home missionaries and administrators. Attendees will have an opportunity to meet and spend time with missionaries and their families.

Our synod greatly appreciates the dedication and work of LWMS. We thank the women of LWMS for all they do to support the proclamation of the gospel here in the United States and around the world, and we pray for God's blessings on their convention.

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

## New director for WELS Special Ministries

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**R**ev. Joel Gaertner has accepted the call to serve as the director of the Commission on Special Ministries, taking over for Rev. James Behringer who served in the role for 11 years and is retiring this month. Gaertner has started his work and officially will be commissioned at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis., on Wed., June 21.

“I want to give thanks and gratitude and appreciation to Jim Behringer for all that he’s done in the last 11 years for continuing to advance Special Ministries. I am grateful and humbled for the opportunity to serve in this role,” says Gaertner.

The Commission on Special Ministries offers spiritual care and other services to people whose needs are not typically met by the regular ministries of WELS congregations and schools. This includes ministry to members in the military; outreach to those in prison; resources for those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or visually impaired; support for parents with children who have special needs; resources for mental health needs; and more.

Gaertner is not new to the work of WELS Special Ministries. He has spent many years on the commission and has served as the director of Jesus Cares Ministries for the last 10 years. He says even from his earliest days in the ministry, he has always had the opportunity to serve those with different needs in congregational ministry.

“One of the exciting things for me in taking this call is to grow awareness,” says Gaertner. “Look at all the various

things Special Ministries does. It gives us the opportunity to share Jesus with a whole lot of people who, sadly, a lot of times get left out, are marginalized, or just aren’t taken care of. That’s where I want to keep it going and raise the awareness.”

Behringer says, “There’s nobody better equipped to succeed as director of Special Ministries than Joel because he has been working in the field for a lot of his ministry.”

After more than a decade serving as the director of Special Ministries, Behringer reflects, “Love the people who struggle. Love the prodigals. Love people so much that you can’t stand the thought that they are unable to hear a sermon or read a Christian devotion. Love them so much that you ask the Lord how he wants us to overcome the obstacles that loom large. Love them so much that you see the gifts God gave them. And love those who serve with you.”

He concludes, “In addition to being in the Word, sharing the faith, and worshiping the Lord, how we love one another is an essential part of Christian and congregational life.”

Learn more about WELS Special Ministries at [wels.net/special-ministries](https://wels.net/special-ministries). 

## CELC meets in Seoul, South Korea

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**T**he 2023 Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) convention was held in Seoul, South Korea, June 6-8. Representatives and guests from 27 countries around the world attended the convention, which was originally scheduled for 2020. This eagerly anticipated event

hosted by Seoul Lutheran Church offered a unique platform for devoted Lutherans from around the world to deepen their faith, engage in theological discussions, and foster fellowship. Providing a rich program of worship, devotions, theological presentations, and networking opportunities, the convention served as a source of inspiration and an avenue for strengthening biblical fellowship between these church bodies.


An opening communion service brought the participants together around Word and sacrament. Pastors from a variety of CELC church bodies presented devotions, and hymns were sung throughout the week. Several times during the convention, CELC president Rev. Tom Nass noted the beautiful sound of voices from so many cultures blending together when singing the hymns and liturgies.

The convention’s theological essays provided much opportunity for discussion. Pastors and professors from various regions presented these papers and led discussions on multiple topics ranging from civil government to training laity for evangelism. Attendees had the opportunity to engage one another with questions and shared experiences from their respective fields. The essays helped to foster a deeper understanding of the core beliefs that unite these churches.

Seoul, a city blending rich tradition with modernity, provided a vibrant backdrop for the convention. Seoul Lutheran Church provided a tour of Gyeongbokgung Palace, one of South

Korea’s most important historical sites, followed by a banquet filled with traditional Korean delicacies. Professional musicians entertained the attendees after the banquet with a program of beautiful classical and traditional Korean music.

The convention offered a unique environment for fellowship and networking, allowing attendees to build connections with Lutherans from different cultures and backgrounds. Informal interactions during breaks and meals facilitated the exchange of personal experiences, challenges, and triumphs within the context of shared faith. Pastors, church leaders, and laypeople alike had the opportunity to form meaningful relationships, laying the foundation for future collaborations, mutual support, and unity within this worldwide confessional Lutheran community.

The CELC is an international fellowship of 34 confessional Lutheran church bodies, of which WELS is a member. Learn more about the CELC at [celc.info](https://celc.info). 

*Submitted by Rev. Paul Fries, communications director, Evangelical Lutheran Synod*



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