

TOGETHER



November 19, 2019

Recently announced changes in East Asia mission field

Recently the Board for World Missions decided to pull our East Asia Team missionaries and families out of their focus country because of security concerns. The government of their focus country is now regularly detaining, interrogating, and deporting any Westerner or group suspected of religious activity. Many mission organizations, large and small, have already pulled their operations out of the country over the past few years.

The East Asia missionaries and their families are being relocated to a nearby country from which they hope to continue their work in the focus country through online teaching, through distance mentoring and coaching, and through regular monthly visits back into the focus country. Over the next few months, the team will be working hard to acquire new visas and adjust to the new reality in the relocation country.

The Board for World Missions and the East Asia Administrative Committee have been monitoring this situation for the last few years and had been preparing for this contingency for months. As a result, the team is not in a state of panic, and everyone is safely out of harm's way. Most important, the team is humbly confident that the Lord works even through these difficult times to advance his kingdom's work.

The leadership also continues to closely monitor the political situation in Hong Kong where Asia Lutheran Seminary is located.

Please keep this situation in your prayers. Pray that our heavenly Father would protect the brothers and sisters of the focus country and give them courage to continue to stand upon the gospel and share it. Pray that our missionaries and families would be encouraged in this time of upheaval. Pray that the Lord would continue to keep the professors, staff, and families of Asia Lutheran Seminary safe.

Serving in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

MLP hosts translation expo in Africa

WELS Multi-Language Publications (MLP) sponsored a conference in Lusaka, Zambia, in August to equip and inspire representatives from our partner synods in Africa. The MLP Expo 2019 brought 17 Africans from 6 countries and 3 American missionaries together for 4 days. The two main objectives of this event were to give participants linguistic tools to translate confessional Lutheran literature from English into their local languages and to produce a prioritized list of the publications needed in each sister synod.

Missionary John Roebke of the One Africa Team, says, “Our partners in Africa are looking for the essential tools needed to conduct gospel ministry. Thankfully translations of the Bible in their native tongues already exist. But how confidently can someone call himself ‘Lutheran’ if he never read anything written by Martin Luther?”


Both the Ethiopian and Kenyan Lutheran synods want to translate the Small Catechism into a total of seven languages between them. Other goals include adapting MLP’s “Bible Stories in Pictures—Expanded Version” for Sunday schools in the African churches as well as creating doctrinally sound hymnals, evangelism tracts, and prayer books for special services such as funerals and church dedications.

Roebke reports, “Our African brothers and sisters in Christ want to walk with us in the same faith, yet they have a much more difficult path to follow than we can even begin to understand. In Cameroon, armed rebels shut down the country every week on Mondays and are threatening to make this a permanent arrangement until they get independence. Pastor Mathias walks six hours to preach at one of the congregations he serves and then another six hours to get home. Pastor Mweete struggles to increase attendance at Bible class and to keep from losing his members to the Pentecostal church. Pastor Onunda tries to communicate the Bible’s timeless truth to the youth of his church, even though they don’t understand his Lutheran style of worship and he doesn’t speak their ‘Sheng’ (a type of slang that is popular among Kenyan youth).”

Reading materials printed on paper are still the primary method of receiving information about the world in these regions of Africa. Although some older smartphones and social media apps are starting to appear in the capital cities of Africa, internet access remains an expensive luxury for most people.

“WELS congregations across the United States make use of hymnals, Sunday school lessons, and other educational books without any thought of where those materials come from. Each one of our sister synods in Africa also has a great need for high-quality, scripturally faithful materials printed in at least

two or three of the languages spoken by their members. God’s servants work diligently for months and even years before their manuscripts come into print. Tight budgets, untimely illnesses, and armed conflict stop publications projects in their tracks,” says Roebke.

To learn more about the work of WELS Multi-Language Publications, visit wels.net/mlp. 

Hymnal Project continues to move forward

The WELS Hymnal Project Executive Committee met for its final face-to-face meeting this month. This 14-member committee charged with carrying out the development of the new hymnal and its auxiliary resources started meeting in 2013.

At that meeting, the committee made final decisions on the two main pew books—the Hymnal pew edition and the Psalter pew edition—before sending the files to Northwestern Publishing House for editing, proofreading, and layout.

“There was a temporary pause for reflection at the meeting,” says Rev. Michael Schultz, director of the WELS Hymnal Project, “but there are still a lot of things to finish to get the balance of the books out.”

Schultz is talking about the 15 to 17 books and 3 digital products that will accompany the hymnal—the majority

of which will be released at the same time as the hymnal in Advent 2021. Several subcommittees of the WELS Hymnal Project are continuing to write and develop these materials that will provide direction, support, and resources to pastors, worship planners, musicians, and choir directors. The Technology Committee especially is ramping up as it takes finished materials and inputs them into a digital service builder software program.

To begin introducing the new hymnal to WELS members, the WELS Hymnal Project is releasing a 64-page preview booklet at the January 2020 WELS Leadership Conference in Chicago. Each congregation also will receive multiple copies of the booklet. Schultz says the booklet will show features of the new hymnal, psalter, and other resources so that congregations can start planning for the hymnal’s release. A formal Hymnal Introduction Program will start at the same time, offering introductions to the products that are coming out, ideas for introducing the hymnal to members, as well as tips for funding. New hymnal materials also will be highlighted and featured at the next worship conference in 2021.

Schultz says the executive committee will still meet online as products continue to be finalized. He says, “There’s still a lot of work to do!”

Read more from Schultz in his October *Forward in Christ* article. Learn more about the work of the WELS Hymnal Project at weshymnal.com. 



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