

New chaplain moving to Europe

Rev. John Hartwig is moving to Germany to serve WELS military members and civilians living abroad as the European civilian chaplain, a ministry of WELS Military Services, part of WELS Commission on Special Ministries. Hartwig received the call following the retirement of Rev. Don Stuppy, who has been serving as the European civilian chaplain since 2017. The WELS European civilian chaplain is based in Spiesheim, Germany, serving people in a number of German cities but also traveling to serve those in Italy, England, and Switzerland.

Hartwig and his wife, Helen, plan to move to Spiesheim later this month. Hartwig has spent the last 25 years of his ministry serving as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Prior to his call at the seminary, he served as a missionary in Thailand from 1993 through 1995 and in Malawi, his first assignment when he graduated in 1983.

"It interested me to serve as a pastor again after being a seminary professor for 25 years, to worship with people and lead them in Bible study," says Hartwig. "And the military aspect is something I'm very eager about. These are generally young people who are away from home, probably for the first time, and need to hear God's Word and to be grounded in their faith."

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the work of the European chaplain as travel has been

restricted as well as visits to the bases. Hartwig says it's starting to open up a little and hopefully he'll be able to meet the people he serves when he gets there.

"I'm looking forward to serving people directly with Word and sacrament," says Hartwig.

One of the newer initiatives from Military Services that Hartwig will undertake is working to identify lay leaders within the military who can help serve their brothers and sisters in arms and in Christ, whether at base or in the field. In addition, particularly in a post-coronavirus world, the Military Services Committee is exploring options for more online interaction, so that the chaplain can meaningfully interact with members more frequently.

If you, a family member, or a friend is living or working in Europe, Hartwig wants to be able to serve you. He, along with Military Services, request that you fill out the online referral form at wels.net/refer. Whether a military service member is based in Europe or in the United States, the referral form connects service people with either the chaplain in Europe or a military contact pastor in the U.S.

Learn more about WELS Military Services at wels.net/military. 

TOGETHER



June 16, 2020

A welcome return


The past three months have been difficult and challenging for congregations throughout the synod. Government mandates required congregations to drastically scale back or even discontinue in-person worship services. Schools were closed, graduation celebrations were canceled, and public confirmations of young people were postponed. In spite of those challenges, our congregations found ways to continue to provide members with opportunities to worship digitally and to continue to hear the proclamation of God's saving Word. And now, in recent weeks, the happy task of reopening carefully has begun. While congregations continue to adjust their schedules and their procedures as precautions, in most places we are back in God's house for worship.

On the synod and district level, adjustments also needed to be made in response to COVID-19. District conventions were canceled (with voting for district officers done electronically). The WELS International Youth Rally and the convention of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society could not be held. Graduations at all synodical schools and assignments at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were held online. All synodical travel was discontinued.

At the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry (CMM), the first adjustment meant that all meetings were canceled or postponed. When the Wisconsin governor issued his "Safer at Home" mandate, the decision was made to have all but a handful of workers at the CMM work remotely from home.

Now that the restrictions have eased, we have begun steps to resume normal operations. On June 2, 50 percent of the workers returned to work at the CMM. On Wednesday, June 17, all on-site workers will be back in the building. After workers are back, we will begin to accommodate small meetings and individual meetings with synod staff by appointment. We have put in place necessary safeguards to ensure the health and safety of our workers and visitors. For now, however, we are not scheduling large meetings or group tours of the CMM.

We pray that later in the summer all normal activities at the CMM can take place. We are thankful for your patience and understanding as we work through these challenges. Most of all, we thank the Lord that he gave us ways to continue carrying out the work he has given us to do.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 



To sign up for the e-mail version, visit wels.net/together.

Christian Aid and Relief assists in Midland

Holy Scripture, Midland, Mich., part of WELS' sister synod the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, has been impacted by floodwaters three times in the last 40 years, but the recent flooding that hit Midland was by far the most catastrophic.

On May 19 and 20, floodwaters from heavy rains and two failed dams swept through the area, resulting in waist-deep water throughout the church. The parsonage, home to Rev. Paul Schneider and his wife, Barbara, was also flooded. The flood impacted a multitude of families in the area around the church, including members of Holy Scripture and nearby Good Shepherd, the area WELS church. The damage to the entire affected area is estimated to be over \$175 million.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief quickly assessed the situation in Midland and deployed aid. Assisted by the leadership team of Good Shepherd and 95 volunteers, the Christian Aid and Relief team worked to clean out and sanitize the homes of 15 families.

"God is still in control," says Schneider, after surveying the extensive damage to Holy Scripture and its furnishings, including the loss of all the hymnals and most of the Bibles. "The church is not just a building. The holy Christian church is all believers. We are going to survive. We are going to continue to serve our Lord, with his help and strength."


Multiple WELS congregations answered the call to assist their Midland brothers and sisters by donating replacement hymnals and

Bibles. One congregation offered to donate funds that had been earmarked for its summer church programming, which was canceled due to COVID-19. WELS members throughout the Michigan District also gifted items like vehicles and appliances.

In the weeks ahead, Midland families will also need financial support so they can hire professionals to provide services to make their homes livable.

Elizabeth Zambo from WELS Christian Aid and Relief talks about the eternal blessings that have come out of this devastating situation: "During times like these, people may be more receptive as we share the gospel message and the hope that we have in our Savior, Jesus."

Christian Aid and Relief chairman, Rev. Robert Hein, says, "When natural disasters strike, such as the broken dams in Midland, WELS Christian Aid and Relief is eager to offer financial help and volunteers to assist the recovery efforts of our local congregations. It's a great way to put Christ's love into action."

To support WELS Christian Aid and Relief efforts in Midland, you can donate online at community.wels.net (select "Flood Disaster Relief" in the designation field) or send donations to WELS Christian Aid and Relief, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr. Waukesha, WI 53188, and designate them for "Flood Disaster Relief." 

New full-time director for Christian Aid and Relief

This month Rev. Dan Sims began his work as the new full-time director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

"As much as I will miss parish ministry, I'm really excited about this new call," says Sims, who served the last four and a half years as pastor at Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.

"Christian Aid and Relief is doing a lot of great work, and I'm excited to increase the opportunities and extend the reach."

The mission of Christian Aid and Relief is to reflect Christ's love and compassion to souls suffering from disasters and hardships. The organization works with congregations and mission fields to offer humanitarian aid as well as boots-on-the-ground service to people who need help, all the while sharing the gospel message that inspires the work.

"Our Savior tells us to show compassion to those who have need—whether that need is a humanitarian need or from some disaster," says Sims. "One of the great impacts of carrying out our Savior's plan is that it gains us opportunities to talk to them about their greatest need and the one who fulfills that need—their Savior."

The past several years, a five-man commission—with a chairman who also serves as a full-time pastor—oversaw the work. The Synodical Council decided last fall to call for a full-time director who will continue to work with the commission to develop policies, establish action plans, review humanitarian aid projects, and discuss grants for people facing extreme medical and financial challenges.

"Calling a pastor to serve as director emphasizes the spiritual aspect of our relief ministry," says Rev. Robert Hein, chairman of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. "He is well suited to preach at congregations, prepare materials, and make presentations to pastors and other leaders to promote the biblical basis for our ministry of compassion."

Having a pastor serve full time in this position will allow more time to develop an intensive program—including a printed training manual and video materials—to prepare and train congregations and their leaders in disaster response before a disaster hits. Another goal is to establish and equip disaster relief coordinators in each district to assess and oversee local disaster response.

But Sims wants to do more than just respond to disasters; he wants to create a compassionate spirit in WELS congregations to help those who are suffering in their communities. He says that not only does that follow Christ's command to "do good to all people" (Galatians 6:10), but also "if [the neighborhood residents] can see WELS congregations and people as caring and active in helping with physical needs, then we gain more opportunities to talk with them about their spiritual needs and their Savior." Sims looks to partner more closely with WELS areas of ministry to provide training as well as examples of such ministry opportunities.

Sims, a 1997 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., has served as the Western Wisconsin district secretary as well as secretary for the WELS Hymnal Project.

Discover more at wels.net/relief. 