


devotional opportunities for Lent—*Forward in Christ* teamed up with WELS Commission on Worship to offer short weekly videos based on each verse. WELS musicians offer different musical arrangements for each verse. The videos also include illustrations by WELS artist Corissa Nelson. The videos will be released on social media each Wednesday in Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday, March 2. They also will be online at forwardinchrist.net/videos.

“The text of the new hymn is powerful and moving on its own, just as poetry,” says Rev. Bryan Gerlach, director of WELS Commission on Worship. “But when joined to beautiful music and interpretive art, it’s all the more meaningful. I am thankful for the many artistic and creative people who contributed to this project.”

Congregations may “share” *Forward in Christ’s* post each week or embed the video on their own social media or website post. 

Did you know...

WELS has a Facebook page?
facebook.com/welslutherans

WELS has Instagram?
instagram.com/welslutherans

WELS has Twitter?
twitter.com/welstweets

***Forward in Christ* magazine has a Facebook page?**
facebook.com/forwardinchristmagazine

***Forward in Christ* magazine has Instagram?**
instagram.com/forward_in_christ_magazine/

TOGETHER



March 1, 2022

Synodical Council holds winter 2022 meeting

The Synodical Council (SC) met Feb. 25 and 26 for its winter meeting. Here are some of the things that the SC discussed and decided:

- Financial news was universally positive across all areas of the synod’s ministries. Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) for the first six months of the fiscal year (July through December) totaled \$12.4 million, higher than planned and higher than the previous year. The Financial Stabilization Fund decreased to \$15.8 million as of Dec. 31, 2021. 2021 CMO totaled \$22.7 million, an increase of 4.3 percent (\$938,000) over 2020. This is the highest CMO on record.
- The ministerial education schools, WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, and Northwestern Publishing House all experienced strong starts to the fiscal year.
- The Schwan Foundation provided \$1,879,000 in its regular grant to the synod for 2022; it also awarded an additional \$125,000 in special project fund grants for 2022.
- The Ministry Financial Plan was modified to enable Luther Preparatory School, Martin Luther College, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to fill necessary staff positions or to complete other needed projects. The additional spending will come from funds available at the schools and not through increased operating support.
- Special fund reserves held by all areas of ministry increased to \$80.2 million as of Dec. 31, 2021, up significantly from forecasts.
- Due to recent inflationary trends, the SC approved a change to wage increases for Fiscal Year 2023 (starting in July 2022) to an average of 3.5 percent, 1.5 percent higher than the previously approved average of 2.0 percent. While not covering the full inflationary increases that everyone is feeling, this action is intended to provide called workers with at least some relief and is consistent with projected wage increase expectations for U.S. employers.
- The mileage reimbursement rate was increased to 56 cents per mile, effective March 1, 2022.
- The SC asked Luther Preparatory School to conduct a financial feasibility study for its proposed new music center.
- The SC received a presentation by Northwestern Publishing House to develop a new K-12 religion curriculum for our Lutheran schools. The SC



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will be asking the Conference of Presidents (COP) to discuss how such a project could best be carried out under the auspices of the Commission on Lutheran Schools, with input from the Commission on Discipleship, the ministerial education schools, and Northwestern Publishing House. The COP will discuss this request in April.

- The SC received a presentation by Home Missions on the “100 Missions in 10 Years” initiative. Planning has already begun, with the program launching in fall 2023.
- World Missions reported that work is continuing to train Hmong pastors in Vietnam. With travel restrictions starting to ease, it is our prayer that construction of the training center in Hanoi can begin soon. World Missions also reported that the first WELS missionary has arrived in London and has begun to work with a core group of WELS families living in London. There is a possibility that a second missionary will be sent to London in the coming months.
- Rev. Jon Kolander and Mr. Mike Krueger were re-appointed to the WELS Foundation board. The assets of WELS Foundation increased by 6.34 percent to \$79 million during calendar year 2021.
- Mr. Jeff Fisher was re-appointed to the Accounting Oversight Committee.
- Loan demand through WELS Church Extension Fund remains weak, with less building activity going on due to the pandemic.
- WELS Benefit Plans reports that the transition to the new retirement program is going well, with only 30 congregations not completing the enrollment process to date; those 30 are expected to complete the process in time for the April deadline. The current pension plan achieved a strong investment return of 16.1 percent during 2021; the funding status of the current plan, based on WELS’ actuarial assumptions, is 112.3 percent compared to 72.1 percent only three years ago.

Five members of the SC have completed their service. Rev. Don Tollefson and Rev. Paul Janke will retire at the end of June. Mr. Brad Johnston has “termed out,” and Mr. Tim Kriewall has decided not to seek re-election. Board for Home Missions administrator Rev. Keith Free, an advisory member of the SC, has accepted a call into the parish ministry.

The SC will not meet for its April meeting unless there is an urgent and unexpected need to do so.

We thank God for his many blessings on our synod.

Serving with you in Christ,

WELS President Mark Schroeder 

An update from Ukraine

WELS Ukraine liaison Rev. Roger Neumann has been able to maintain regular contact with leaders from the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC), WELS’ sister church body. As of Tuesday morning, Neumann is reporting that so far the members there remain physically unharmed. However, all but 2 of the 17 congregations, comprising approximately 600 members, are in the direct line of the Russian advance. Two of the pastors have been cut off from communication. Many were able to hold online or in-person worship during the invasion on Sunday morning.

Neumann reports, “There’s a lot of fear, mixed with anger and bewilderment, as to why this is happening. They are very encouraged by the international support; very encouraged by the prayers of WELS people that are going out.”

According to Neumann, some members have been able to flee the country. However, at this time, all Ukrainian men between ages 18 and 60 are required to remain to defend their country as needed. The people who have stayed are taking shelter at night in the underground subway stations and come out during the day to find food and supplies. So far, limited supplies are still available, but the shelves are getting emptier.

WELS is financially assisting two ULC churches in western Ukraine that are setting up refugee centers to welcome Ukrainians who are fleeing from war-torn areas in the east, but space and resources are limited. Hundreds of thousands of people are currently on the move. Money is

also being sent to help buy supplies for these refugees. At the time of this writing, banks and supermarkets are still open. The situation is being closely monitored regarding how funds can be safely and effectively sent and used.

“When this is all said and done—and Lord willing, it’s going to be soon and Lord willing, it’s going to be where they will keep their sovereignty—there is going to be a tremendous need for humanitarian aid,” Neumann predicts. “Pray for Ukraine; pray for the people. That’s the number one thing, and the rest God will take care of in his way.”

If you’d like to give a gift to support these relief efforts, visit wels.net/wmgift and select “Ukraine” from the dropdown menu. 

Forward in Christ highlights the seven words of Jesus

This Lenten season, *Forward in Christ* is focusing on Jesus’ final words from the cross, highlighting the seven statements through articles, music, and art.

In the March edition, a different author delves into each of Jesus’ statements, offering insights and lessons for the world today. The issue also features a new original Lenten hymn from *Christian Worship: Hymnal* called “The Seven Words” (Hymn 436), written by Rev. Michael Schultz, director of the WELS Hymnal Project. The hymn uses the tune of the well-known Lenten hymn, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.”

To help familiarize members with this hymn—as well as provide more