

April 5, 2022

Good outcome for a court case in Finland


Religious freedom and the ability to proclaim the teachings of Scripture without fear of government persecution is something we in the United States have taken for granted. But there are increasing examples from around the world where even seemingly free and democratic countries are attempting to restrict the abilities of Christians to express their faith and their teachings openly.

In Finland, a member of Parliament and former Minister of the Interior, Paivi Rasanen, was charged with “hate speech” for sharing her faith-based views dealing with marriage and sexual ethics in her writings and in media interviews. A Lutheran bishop, Juhana Pohjola, was also charged because he published some of Rasanen’s writings.

When charges were brought, confessional Lutheran churches from around the world signed a letter to the prosecutors in Finland that strongly urged the court to uphold the principle of freedom of religion and free speech and to dismiss the charges against Rasanen and Pohjola. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and our sister churches in Europe signed the letter, along with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and its partner churches.

Last week, the Finnish court upheld the right to free speech by dismissing all charges against Paivi Rasanen and Bishop Pohjola.

We are happy that the courts of Finland made this decision. But this entire episode is a reminder that the freedom we enjoy to proclaim the truths of Scripture can never be taken for granted. We pray that God would preserve this freedom for us here in America and give us the courage to “speak about the things that we have seen and heard.”

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Board for Home Missions approves five new missions

On March 31–April 1, the WELS Board for Home Missions met and approved 12 new mission requests—five new home mission starts, five enhancements at existing congregations, and two unsubsidized missions.

New home missions are being supported in:

- **Windsor, Colo.**, where WELS congregations in Ft. Collins, Loveland, and Greeley are supporting this mission start in a rapidly growing area in northern Colorado. Currently

20 WELS families are located in the target area, which has no Lutheran churches.

- **Wichita, Kan.**, where the area population is expected to grow by ten percent over the next ten years on the east side of the city. This will be a second site ministry for Messiah, Wichita.
- **Canton, Ga.**, a fast-growing suburb of metro Atlanta identified by members and leadership from Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., as a prime location to plant a new mission church.
- **Conroe, Texas**, the northernmost suburb of Houston, which is the fifth-fastest-growing city in the United States. Abiding Word, Houston, Texas, is helping this new mission get off the ground.
- **Lodi, Wis.**, which is a second-site ministry for Zion, Leeds, Wis. Zion has already leased a ministry center in Lodi and the 17-person ministry team hopes to launch worship services this year. This mission is financially supported by Zion, but it will receive support from Home Missions through the district mission board, mission counselors, and special grants.
- The Board for Home Missions is also financially supporting ministry enhancements for St. John, St. Paul, Minn.; Cross of Glory, Baton Rouge, La.; Divine Savior, Delray Beach, Fla.; Abiding Savior, Killeen, Texas; and Our Savior, Burlington, Iowa. It is providing unsubsidized support to Mount Calvary, Redding/Anderson, Calif.; and Living Faith, Midlothian, Texas. More details about these ministries can be found at wels.net/newstarts.

Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions, commends district mission board members and mission counselors for the hard work that went into the 28 new ministry requests that the Board for Home Missions received for consideration during last week's meetings. As Free notes, "Not all the requests could be funded, but \$610,000 of new ministry was. Thank you, Lord, for those who support gospel outreach through WELS' home mission churches."

WELS currently has 141 home mission congregations in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking West Indies. To learn more about WELS Home Missions, visit wels.net/homemissions.

Show your youth rally excitement

Get ready for the WELS International Youth Rally by sharing your excitement with anyone who sees you! For the first time ever, WELS International Youth Rally apparel and items are available to purchase online prior to the event. Items include a hoodie, long-sleeved tee, rally hat, socks—including WELS-logo socks—and more!

Check it out at welsyouthrally.orderpromos.com.

Haven't registered yet? There's still time to get a group together and register. The youth rally will be taking place June 28–July 1, 2022, at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The rally is open to all WELS teens heading into their freshman year of high school through seniors graduating this spring. Youth from

around North America will gather for group worship, small workshops, and recreation and fellowship.

Learn more and register at wels.net/youthrally.

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