

TOGETHER

April 19, 2022

who are leading the 270-member Russian church body. "The first time I was able to talk to all the pastors, I shared my concern for them," says Wolfgramm. "Pastor Alexei said, 'We're in good hands. We're in God's hands, and that's the best place to be.' They definitely see that this is God at work to speed up the timetable to give them opportunities to share Jesus' peace in a world that desperately needs it."

WELS will continue to support the Russian church as it is able to under current sanctions. "Back in the 1990s when the Iron Curtain fell, we were able to rush in with missionaries and plant a church," says Rev. Larry Schlomer, World Missions administrator. "The current reality is that another curtain has been set up that divides us from the Russian people. Our prayers go out for the church members there that their connection to their Savior through the means of grace stays strong as God leads us to a new stage of fellowship." 

A donor advised fund: one-stop giving

WELS member and attorney Mr. David Nommensen and his wife, Bonnie, knew that setting up a donor advised fund was an ideal and tax-wise way to support ministry at their home congregation, First Lutheran in Elkhorn, Wis.


David likes the fact that their donor advised fund provides predictable, ongoing support to ministry at First,

helping fund programs that spread the gospel both inside and outside the church and school. He also likes the tax benefits of the donor advised fund. "It was just part of good stewardship," says David. "Bonnie and I could look at the taxes that we had saved and do a little soul-searching and perhaps give a little more."

Donor advised funds are very popular since a donor can give a gift now and recommend the ministries that benefit later. The gift can be divided among the ministries the donor cares about, and a single receipt will be provided for income tax purposes.

In addition to ongoing support for their church and school, the Nommensens know that their family donor advised fund is a wonderful way to involve their kids and grandkids in the joy of giving since they can be included in the decision-making process for the grant recommendations. It's another way to pass along Christian values to the next generation of believers.

"Our prayer is that the donor advised fund is around a lot longer than Bonnie and I are," says David. "And it's a nice opportunity for us to have these conversations with our children about the needs of our favorite church organization. I'm really hoping that someday my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be donating to this fund and having those same conversations."

Learn more about donor advised funds by contacting your local WELS Christian giving counselor at 800-827-5482 or mcg@wels.net. 

Conference of Presidents holds spring 2022 meeting

The Conference of Presidents held its spring meeting on April 4-6. Here are some of the issues that were discussed and decisions that were made at the meeting.


- There are 162 vacancies in pastoral positions, with 141 of those being vacancies in congregations. The graduating class at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary will number only in the mid-20s, which means that the shortage of pastors will continue. Next year's class numbers in the 40s, which should provide some relief a year from now. Teacher vacancies number in the 300s. After the assignment of teachers at Martin Luther College (MLC) in May, nearly 200 teacher vacancies will remain. The district presidents will be working with congregations to find ways to fill those vacancies before school starts in the fall.
- After Mr. Bill Ziche retired from his position as president of Northwestern Publishing House, Mr. Jeremy Angle was hired by the board to serve as his replacement. Mr. Angle will begin his duties as president in early May.
- The COP expressed its thanks to God and to WELS members for the generous support that has been given for humanitarian work in Ukraine.
- Mark Gabb, chairman of the Board for Home Missions (BHM), and Rev. Keith Free, BHM administrator, provided the COP with an overview of the 100 missions in 10 years initiative.
- The COP called Rev. Philip Spaude to serve in a part-time retirement call as a Christian giving counselor. The COP also issued full-time calls to Rev. Lon Kuether, Rev. Craig Wasser, and Rev. Steven Schmeling as Christian giving counselors.
- The COP was given a presentation by Dr. Victor Vieth, a nationally recognized expert on child abuse (and WELS member). Vieth gave a strong encouragement to the COP to assist WELS congregations to adopt policies that will serve to help congregations to identify potential victims of child abuse. District presidents will be making resources available to congregations to help them be more informed about the issues and to take steps toward prevention and providing needed spiritual care.
- Rev. Phil Hirsch, president of the Nebraska District, was elected to as one of the three COP representatives on the Synodical Council, replacing North Atlantic District President Rev. Don Tollefson, who is retiring in June.
- As requested by the Synodical Council, the COP directed the Commission on Lutheran Schools to begin developing a new K-12 religion curriculum.



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- The COP endorsed a proposal by MLC to offer a Competency-Based Education program to encourage people not trained at MLC to consider training for the teaching ministry in WELS.
- An Early Childhood Ministry Task Force has been formed to evaluate the needs of teachers and calling bodies and to recommend strategic curricular approaches to meet those needs.
- The COP asked Rev. Paul Prange, administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education, to take responsibility for planning and carrying out the Grow in Grace retreats for pastors who have served for 10, 25, and 35 years. This had previously been the responsibility of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.
- The COP plans to distribute a final draft of its document “God’s Beautiful and Balanced Design for Male and Female” for discussion in late summer or early fall.

The Conference of Presidents will next meet as the Assignment Committee at Martin Luther College and at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in May.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Support for Ukraine continues

Members of the Ukrainian Lutheran Church (ULC), WELS’ sister church body in Ukraine, along with all the people of Ukraine, have been under attack for nearly two months. Many people have fled their homes seeking safety. ULC members have remained unharmed, though they too are facing the hardships of this war. Despite the danger and hardships, the ULC is finding ways to help its fellow countrymen.

WELS members have demonstrated generous hearts to help fellow Christians in Ukraine. WELS World Missions has been able to send funds so that the ULC can buy food and other supplies not only for its members but also to help the many people fleeing their homes. In addition, WELS Christian Aid and Relief has made three donations to Direct Relief, with another gift planned this week. Direct Relief is

an organization equipped to provide immediate medical supplies to places experiencing crises; CAR has worked with this organization in the past.


“ULC members are using the funds in their communities mainly to buy supplies (medical, food, clothing, blankets, etc.). They can get supplies from certain areas and bring them into other areas,” says Rev. Dan Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. “They’re providing these supplies not just to our Lutheran brothers and sisters, but to anybody who has need. While they’re doing it, they’re having all kinds of opportunities to talk to people about their Savior. They said it’s really been quite a thing to see how people have been open to that right now.”

There have been questions and interest in helping Ukrainian refugees who come to the United States. CAR has created a WELS Ukraine Refugee

Volunteer Assistance form for WELS members who may be interested in hosting a Ukrainian refugee at gf.wels.net/ukraine-refugee-volunteer.

Sims says the form is being made available to be ready if there is opportunity to host refugees. Sims iterates, however, that CAR is not a refugee placement organization but can help volunteers connect to the proper authorities to work through the complicated process.

While the hearts of WELS members are ready and eager to help, Sims gives three reasons why these opportunities are likely to be very limited. “One is that the U.S. is only accepting 100,000 refugees, which is a tiny amount. Two, most Ukrainians who have become refugees and fled to other countries don’t want to get too far away, because they’re hoping they will be able to return soon to their homes. The third thing is that Ukrainians who want to come to the U.S. as refugees likely already have contacts or family members in the U.S.,” he says. But, he says, CAR wants WELS to be ready if the opportunity arises.

“We’ve been blown away by the gifts God’s people have sent; they’ve been so generous” says Sims, “We anticipate the need for assistance is going to be high for years to come.” 

New chapter for Russian church

On Tues., March 1, Missionary Luke Wolfgramm and his wife, Jennifer, left their home in Russia, a country in which they have lived and served for the past 25 years. They

discovered they needed to leave four days earlier, the day after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Before they left, Wolfgramm was able to meet with church leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran Church Concord, WELS’ sister church body in Russia, as well as preach at several of the congregations. It was a time to offer encouragement and hope, assurances that Jesus’ church would prevail. It was also a time to provide last-minute instructions to church leaders about the practicalities of managing the church’s business affairs.

“God has been planning this out and preparing us,” says Wolfgramm. “The timing came as a surprise to us but not to him. We were planning to get there, just not so quickly.”

The Wolfgramms were planning to leave Russia in 2024. “We were in Russia for 25 winters. God blessed the church over those times,” says Wolfgramm. “But my work is changing. Even before this [evacuation] happened, I wasn’t exclusively a missionary to Russia. I was also working with other churches in Europe.” This means that he partners in ministry with a dozen sister churches in Europe, helping with training seminary students, leading workshops, mentoring, and preaching. “My work is to fellowship with churches—talk together, work together, pray for each other,” he says. The church in Russia will continue to be one of the churches he partners with, just not as a resident missionary.

For the short term, the Wolfgramms are living in Durres, Albania, helping train a seminary student there. They still keep in touch with the three pastors and one seminary student