

April 4, 2023


Conference of Presidents holds spring 2023 meeting

At its spring meeting last week, the Conference of Presidents (COP) discussed the following issues:

- The COP discussed the pastor and teacher shortage and how best to address the growing number of vacancies.
- The COP has adopted guidelines for congregations to follow as they work to fill teacher vacancies in a time of growing teacher shortages.
- A committee has been appointed to plan for the synod's 175th anniversary in 2025. Prof. Joel Otto is chairman. The theme of the celebration will be "Christ through Us." A special anniversary offering will be gathered to support specific projects in Home Missions, World Missions, and Ministerial Education.
- Rev. Joel Gaertner accepted the COP's call to serve in Congregational Services as the director of Special Ministries.
- The COP discussed how best to advise congregations that are considering merging or closing. The COP is asking Congregational Services to provide materials that will guide congregations as they make those decisions.
- Rev. Dan Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, encouraged the district presidents to assist in naming district liaisons who can help to coordinate disaster relief. The plan is to have liaisons in place by July 1.
- The COP discussed a proposal to change the synod convention from a biennial to a triennial event. Since this would be a major constitutional change that would require approval by two conventions, the COP decided that the issue should be placed before the 2024 district conventions for reaction and input. The COP itself has taken no position on the issue.
- The COP continued its discussion of the re-statement of the synod's doctrinal statement on male-female roles. The issue will be discussed by district conventions in 2024 and at various called worker conferences.
- WELS Ministry of Christian Giving reported that 96 percent of all WELS congregations had submitted statistical reports and subscriptions for Congregation Mission Offerings. That percentage is actually higher when congregations with a pastoral vacancy are not included.
- The COP approved a pilot project for a voluntary mentoring system for called worker spouses. The pilot project will take place in the South Central District.
- With the growing need for Christian counselors, the COP was asked by Christian Family Solutions if the COP would encourage such training at Martin Luther College and/or Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The COP is

aware that such a program is in the long-range plan of Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) and concluded that WLC is the appropriate place for such training to take place.

- The COP made the following appointments or re-appointments: Prof. James Danell, Prof. Joel Otto, and Prof. Nicolas Schmoller (Commission on Inter-Church Relations); Rev. Eric Steinbrenner (Chairman of the Commission on Constitutional Matters); Rev. Richard Waldschmidt (Commission on Constitutional Matters); Rev. John Dolan and Prof. James Westendorf (Publication Review Committee); Rev. Tim Ehlers (Support Committee); Rev. Joel Zank (COP representative on the Synodical Council).

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Nine new missions and six ministry enhancements approved

On March 24, WELS Board for Home Missions approved the first new missions and enhancements for the synodwide “100 missions in 10 years” initiative.

“Our God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,” says Rev. Mark Gabb, chairman of WELS Board for Home Missions. “So how does it look to live like we believe this? That’s the question that the Board for Home Missions considered as we reviewed the many new start requests. We knew that there were questions about money and pastors, yet with sanctified common sense we made our decisions based on our trust that God can do immeasurably more.”

The nine new mission starts approved include:


- **Bentonville, Ark.:** The 12-person core group has been active in its community, which is home to Walmart’s headquarters and is projected to see 35 percent population growth in the next three years.
- **Boston, Mass.:** The closest WELS church to Boston’s urban center is a 90-minute drive. This urban mission

has potential for college and cross-cultural ministry.

- **Cincinnati, Ohio:** Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio, is starting a second site in the Oakley and Hyde Park neighborhoods with a core group of 20 members.
- **Idaho Falls, Idaho:** With the nearest WELS church three hours away, the 11-person core group has been meeting for weekly Bible studies with a pastor via Zoom.
- **Kalispell, Mont.:** Kalispell, Mont., is considered the fastest-growing micropolitan city (population of 10,000-50,000) in the United States. The core group has been worshipping together twice a month for more than ten years and participating in regular Bible studies for more than eight years.
- **Kronenwetter, Wis.:** Five WELS churches in the greater Wausau, Wis., area are supporting this mission, which will worship at Northland Lutheran High School. The 22-member core group has been meeting monthly since December 2021 for Bible study and mission planning.

- **Marquette, Mich.:** Marquette serves as the hub of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and 52 percent of the people in and around Marquette do not have a home church or attend a church.
- **Panama City Beach, Fla.:** Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla., is expanding west and starting a second site in the greater Panama City Beach area.
- **North Collin County, Texas:** A core group of 15 members from Atonement, Plano, Texas, are part of this new mission in a northern suburb of Dallas. Divine Savior Ministries, a WELS-affiliated organization with four church/school campuses, has partnered with the mission and plans to build a Divine Savior Academy by year five of the mission start.

The Board for Home Missions is also financially supporting ministry enhancements for Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, Iowa; Fairview, Milwaukee, Wis.; Christ the King, Port Charlotte, Fla.; and Divine Savior, Sienna, Texas. It is providing unsubsidized support to Our Redeemer, Ladysmith, Wis., and Good Shepherd, Midland, Texas.

To learn more about these new missions and ministry enhancements, visit wels100in10.net. 

Worship access for the visually impaired

WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired (MVI) has ordered ten copies of the 2021 edition of the

Christian Worship hymnal in braille. The ten-volume braille hymnal contains lyrics of more than 650 hymns along with the standard liturgy. MVI will provide the new braille hymnal free to WELS/ELS churches and visually impaired members who need them.

MVI is also continually adding new resources to its online Listen Library, which provides audio recordings of many WELS resources, such as select books from Northwestern Publishing House, *Forward in Christ* magazine, and *Meditations*. For visually impaired members who use a handheld electronic braille reader, MVI is currently uploading the lyrics of all *Christian Worship* hymns to our Listen Library for braille access by the blind. Users can already search for hymn lyrics at **Listen.WELS.net** under the “Worship” tab.

Anyone who cannot read print materials because of vision impairment or reading disability can access all of MVI’s Christian audio resources for free by completing the MVI Service Application on the Listen Library website.

If you or someone in your congregation would benefit from the printed braille hymnal, contact MVI at welsvisimp@wels.net. MVI is prepared to print additional braille copies of *Christian Worship* if needed.

MVI is always looking for volunteers to help record and edit audio resources to continue growing their library. Learn more at Listen.WELS.net. 



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