

Synodical Council holds fall 2019 meeting

The Synodical Council (SC) met last Friday and Saturday for its fall meeting. Among the items discussed and decision made were:

- After two years of work exploring various options, a special committee presented a proposal to make changes to the synod's retirement benefit program. The proposed improvements to the plan would better support our workers and our overall ministry efforts. Following the Conference of Presidents' support of the proposal in October, the Synodical Council approved the proposal, which will be presented as a resolution to the district conventions this summer. A complete description of the proposal, along with a "Q and A" feature and opportunities for online comments and questions, will be shared with the synod in January. The proposed changes will not apply to current retirees receiving pension benefits.
- The SC heard a report from WELS Christian Aid and Relief detailing ways in which the synod can be better prepared to assist congregations and individuals in times of disaster. The SC extended a call to Rev. Robert Hein to serve as the full-time Director of Christian Aid and Relief, a position that has been unfilled for several years. The director's role will be to facilitate efforts to provide congregations and districts with training to help them prepare for response when disasters strike.
- The SC approved a number of Ministry Financial Plan modifications. One of those modifications gave the approval to the Board for World Missions to move forward with the plans to establish a ministry training school in Vietnam. Funding for this effort has been provided by the generous gifts from congregations and individuals.
- The SC approved funding for one item on the "Unfunded Priority List." This action will enable the calling of an additional person for the congregational counseling effort, which provides assistance to congregations as they consider ministry plans to address increasing challenges posed by demographic changes and other factors.
- The SC received the report on the financial results from the fiscal year that ended June 30. Even though Congregation Mission Offerings were \$300,000 less than the plan, underspending and other factors more than made up for the shortfall and the year ended with the synod in a healthy financial position. WELS Investment Funds has \$225 million of assets under management. The WELS Church Extension Fund and WELS

Foundation also had strong financial results, enabling their boards to transfer excess reserves to the synod for the support of missions and ministry.

- WELS financial statements received an unmodified opinion, the best you can get, from external auditors.
- The SC reviewed the balances in the special funds of the synod's areas of ministry and ministerial education schools and found that across the board the balances were higher than four years ago.

Serving in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Rev. Richard Gurgel accepts call to serve as MLC president

Rev. Richard Gurgel has accepted the call to serve as president of WELS' college of ministry, Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn. He will begin his new call on July 1, 2020.


Gurgel brings years of parish and teaching experience to his new ministry. Since 1999, he has served as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., teaching homiletics, systematics, and Christian education. He also directs the continuing education arm of the seminary, the Grow in Grace Institute.

The MLC Governing Board issued the call Sept. 26, and Gurgel officially accepted Oct. 21, saying, "With a deep awareness of my weaknesses as a jar of clay but with a still deeper appreciation for Christ's forgiving and empowering grace, I accept the call to serve as Martin Luther College's next president. May God give me a double portion of the servant-

hearted, gospel-filled spirit with which President Zarlning has so faithfully served."

Furthermore, Gurgel noted, "God has used and continues to use what happens on MLC's campus to prepare one generation after another of Christian witnesses to proclaim the gospel of his kingdom in classrooms and congregations and communities around the world. Truly a city set on a hill cannot be hidden!"

Rev. Mark Zarlning, retiring president of MLC, is grateful that such a faithful shepherd will soon assume the leadership mantle. "Prof. Gurgel is a shepherd gifted with many abilities and with a heart that beats with the gospel of Jesus Christ," says Zarlning. "I am thrilled that he has accepted and am confident that Jesus will use him mightily for the good of this important ministry."

To learn more about MLC, visit mlc-wels.edu. 

Unrest in Ethiopia affects WELS and sister churches


Recent political unrest in the country of Ethiopia caused some frightening moments for missionaries and pastors of WELS and our sister church bodies in Africa.

Last week, two events scheduled to take place in Ethiopia had to be canceled when riots broke out in several cities. Representatives of the African churches belonging to the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference had planned a meeting in the city of Bishoftu. That meeting was to conclude with the dedication of a new building to house a theological training school operated by the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia.

When the rioting broke out, the U.S. State Department issued a strong advisory that all U.S. citizens should return, if possible, to Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, by air travel or take shelter immediately. After some rather close encounters with armed mobs, World Missions Administrator Larry Schlomer and Professor Emeritus Forrest Bivens, who were already in Ethiopia for the planned events, were able to follow WELS Risk Management's plans and make their way safely out of the country. WELS President Mark Schroeder, who arrived in Ethiopia just as the rioting began, was also able to return safely to the

United States. All representatives from other African countries and WELS missionaries were also able to depart safely.

News reports indicate that the decision to leave was a wise and necessary one. More than 60 people were killed and more than 200 injured when the rioting spread to Addis Ababa.

We pray for the safety of our brothers and sisters in the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia and for the end of the violence in a normally peaceful country. 

Did you know...

WELS has a Facebook page?
facebook.com/welslutherans

WELS has Twitter?
twitter.com/welstweets

WELS has Instagram?
instagram.com/welslutherans



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