

January 20, 2020

Conference of Presidents met for winter 2020 meeting

The Conference of Presidents (COP) met for its winter meeting on Jan. 6-9. The COP meeting addressed many topics, including:

- The COP approved proposals to amend the synod's bylaws dealing with disciplinary procedures carried out by the districts. These proposed changes are intended to clarify the terms, timing, and process to be followed when discipline becomes necessary. The proposed amendments will be reviewed by the synod's Constitution Committee and will ultimately be presented to the 2021 synod convention.
- Asia Lutheran Seminary has enrolled several American students who will soon graduate. To prepare these students for serving in stateside ministry, the COP approved Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's plan to provide these graduates with a year of stateside vicar experience and with two semesters of additional instruction at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.
- The COP issued a divine call to Prof. John Hartwig to serve as a civilian chaplain in Europe and to Mr. James Sievert to serve as a part-time assistant consultant for the Commission on Lutheran Schools.
- The COP has asked for a review of the Ministry of Christian Giving's major gifts program to ensure that the Ministry of Christian Giving is best positioned and structured to carry out its work.
- The COP received with thanks the news that Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) for 2019 were \$330,000 higher than what congregations had committed. CMO subscriptions for 2020 are now being gathered, with the prayer that congregations will be able to increase their subscriptions to provide additional support for WELS missions and ministry. Looking ahead to 2021, the COP will prepare an encouragement video highlighting the blessings that Congregation Mission Offerings have made possible.
- The COP approved a proposal that congregations will be encouraged to designate one Sunday in 2021 as a "WELS Mission and Ministry Sunday" as a way of highlighting the work we do together. Informational and worship materials will be provided.
- Each of the 12 districts will be asked to consider the proposed change to the WELS Pension Plan at this summer's district conventions. Informational materials will be provided well in advance, and each district will be given a detailed overview of the proposed changes. Districts will be asked whether or not they approve of the changes. Depending on the results of those votes, the Synodical Council will determine how and when to proceed with the process.

- The COP has overseen a restatement of the synod's doctrinal position on the roles of men and women, entitled "Male and Female in God's World." The restatement does not reflect a change in our teaching; rather, it was intended to clarify and update the current doctrinal statement. The restatement will be reviewed by pastor and teacher conferences. In addition, an accompanying Bible study is available for use in congregations. The districts will be asked to provide reaction and input before a final draft is presented to the synod convention in 2021.
- The COP has also developed a "Statement on Human Sexuality," which presents a biblical perspective on the transgender issue. To view the documents "Male and Female in God's World" and "Statement on Human Sexuality" go to synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

Easter outreach program available

Victorious!
It's a message that the world needs to hear today.

"Many people in our country feel defeated by life. Many are being defeated by disease. All will eventually be defeated by death," says Rev. Eric Roecker, director of the Commission on Evangelism.

That's why the theme "Victorious" is so fitting for a new outreach program to invite unchurched souls to worship at WELS congregations this Easter. "Easter changes all of that. Because Jesus was victorious over death when he rose from the grave, those who follow him are already victorious knowing that their sin has been forgiven," continues Roecker. "What's more, even though they may die one day, Jesus promises to raise them from the grave and give them eternal life. His victory is our victory."

WELS Congregational Services is providing resources for this synodwide program called Easter 20, or E20. "Outreach programs like E20 provide ready-made materials for congregations

to use so that they do not need to create their own from scratch. This can save both time and money," says Roecker. "Additionally, having a themed approach ties everything together—from postcards to door hangers to business card invites to social media ads." Provided worship plans, service folder designs, and sermon thoughts then help tie that theme into an Easter festival service.

According to Roecker, studies show that Easter services are one of three worship services that unchurched people are most likely to attend. That's why it's so important for congregations—and individual members—to extend the invitation to worship. "People are especially likely to attend if invited by an acquaintance," he says.

Most of the E20 materials are offered as free online downloads, with minimal costs for ordering postcards, business cards, and door hangers. Helpful "how-tos" provide direction for implementing this outreach program successfully.

Learn more at welscongregationalservices.net/e20.

Church in Panama City rededicated after hurricane

What a difference a year makes. On Oct. 10, 2018, Hurricane Michael blew through Panama City, Fla., as a category five hurricane, severely damaging the church and parsonage of Amazing Grace as well as the homes of many of its members. On Oct. 20, 2019, Amazing Grace moved back into its rebuilt worship facility. During that year, more than 200 WELS volunteers poured into Panama City to help Amazing Grace with the necessary cleanup and rebuilding. In addition, people from around the world joined together in praying for their Christian brothers and sisters and donating funds and materials to help.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, Amazing Grace's members banded together to check on one another and to help each other. As soon as the roads were cleared, members from neighboring congregations also pitched in. Then, volunteers from WELS Christian Aid and Relief and Kingdom Workers' Builders For Christ began arriving, including more than 40 Martin Luther College students who volunteered at various times.

"It was an eye-opening experience," says Hailey Stade, one of the Martin Luther College students who helped with cleanup soon after the hurricane. "I had no idea what to expect until we crossed the bridge to Panama City. Buildings were flattened. Every tree you saw was on the ground or bent in

half. Power lines lay all over the sides of streets and sidewalks. A building was considered lucky if it even had some of its roof intact."

The roof of Amazing Grace's church was ripped open during the storm and the parsonage's roof was peeled up, causing flooding throughout the home. With such extensive water damage, most items needed to be replaced and much needed to be rebuilt. Yet Amazing Grace was blessed with donations and volunteers every step along the way to lighten the load.

On Jan. 12, 2020, members of Amazing Grace rededicated their worship space and invited volunteers back to celebrate with them. About 25 volunteers who helped with the rebuilding process attended this grand reopening celebration.

"The grand reopening was more like a grand reunion," says Rev. David Kehl, current pastor at Amazing Grace.

Although the past year posed many challenges for them, members agree that this experience brought them closer together—with each other, with their fellow WELS members, and with their community. As they move forward, they're excited to take the next step with their ministry plans.

As Mr. Torger Reppen, president of Amazing Grace, notes, "It's so nice to be back in our own building, our own home. Now we can focus on outreach. We've been focusing on rebuilding, and now we can focus on daily church stuff." 



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