

tragic accidents as well as looked at how Christians share their faith through various vocations.

“Every Christian is on a journey through life, trusting Jesus to guide, strengthen, and comfort them,” says Rev. John Braun, FIC’s executive editor. “We want to share the stories of Christians who faced challenges along the way to encourage us all. Jesus does not abandon us even in life’s difficult days. We hope this series reminds us all of the Lord’s promises to be with us and sustain us.”

“My Christian life” is just one of the new features introduced by *Forward in Christ* in its redesign launched in January 2020. A Q&A column with accompanying Bible study, an expanded “Confessions of faith” feature, and a monthly photo montage highlighting pictures from our readers join other stories of faith and articles designed to address important issues facing Christians today as well as provide in-depth looks at important biblical truths. As WELS’ official magazine, FIC also shares news from its congregations, schools, ministry affiliates, and synodical areas of ministry.

This year, FIC launched a new website, forwardinchrist.net, and a free weekly e-newsletter that includes articles, photos, and special sneak-peeks. Readers also can engage with the magazine through its social media sites on Facebook and

life” article on a WELS nurse.

To subscribe to the *Forward in Christ* newsletter or to read a “My Christian Life” article as well as many other great articles, visit forwardinchrist.net.

For subscription information, visit Northwestern Publishing House’s website at nph.net or call 1-800-662-6093. ☪

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TOGETHER



October 20, 2020

Conference of Presidents’ October meeting

The Conference of Presidents (COP) met at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis., during the second week of October. This was the first face-to-face meeting of the COP since January. Other meetings, including the assignment of graduates from Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, have been held via Zoom video conference.

In addition to extensive discussion of topics relating to doctrine, congregations, and called workers, the COP took the following actions:

- Extended a divine call to Rev. Tom Westra to serve as a congregational counselor. This is a new position approved last year by the Synodical Council.
- Extended a divine call to Rev. Paul Lindhorst to serve as a Christian giving counselor.
- Received an encouraging financial update from Chief Financial Officer Mr. Kyle Egan. Egan’s report showed the synod ended the last fiscal year in good financial shape due to better-than-expected offerings and significantly lower expenditures. The report also included the good news that Congregation Mission Offerings for the year continue to be higher than planned. Egan also gave an overview of the proposed Ministry Financial Plan (budget) that will be considered by the Synodical Council in November.
- Chose “Here We Stand” as the theme of the 2021 synod convention. On the 500th anniversary of Luther’s bold confession at the Diet of Worms, this theme reminds us of the importance of continuing to stand on the truth of Scripture.
- Encouraged Martin Luther College to discontinue the requirement for at least one in-person course in the synod teacher certification program.
- Reviewed a new video that reminds congregations of the importance of Congregation Mission Offerings. The district presidents will be strongly encouraging all congregations to make this video available to their leaders and members.
- Adopted recommendations for bylaw changes that would re-



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duce the wait time needed for issuing calls for professors at synodical schools.

The next meeting of the Conference of Presidents is scheduled for January 2021. ☩

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder

Home missions faithfully moving forward

Two young WELS mission congregations launched their first public worship services in September.

“Even in the face of the difficulties of COVID-19, our home missionaries and members are faithfully sharing God’s Word in weekly worship following appropriate health guidelines,” says Rev. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions. “Extra efforts are worth it so that we have more opportunities to tell people about Jesus Christ.”

On Sept. 13, Hope, Houston, Texas, held its opening service in a local dance studio. WELS Board for Home Missions authorized funding for this new mission in a growing urban neighborhood in Houston in May 2019. Rev. Andrew Nemmers was assigned to serve the congregation, which is made up of a dedicated group of core members that have been meeting monthly for Bible study since 2015.

Nemmers notes, “Even though this was not how we anticipated start-

ing worship—several core group families unable to join in person, everyone wearing masks, and social distancing—our first service was definitely successful! After months of not being able to gather in person, it was incredibly uplifting to be able to gather together around the Word again. We are excited to see what God has in store for us as we continue worshiping together and reaching out to our community.”

Members of Sure Foundation, Brandon, S.D., opened their ministry center on Sept. 18 and then held their grand opening worship service at a local hotel on Sept. 20.

“After a year of meeting, working, connecting, and planning, there was a great deal of excitement from the core group of Sure Foundation as well as some prospects from the Brandon community,” says Rev. Craig Wilke, Sure Foundation’s home missionary. “We are incredibly excited to continue to reach out to the community of Brandon and to proclaim the comforting message of our Sure Foundation, Jesus.”

Two other home mission congrega-

tions celebrated milestones on Sept. 27. Christ the Rock, Hutto, Texas, and St. Paul, Adams-Friendship, Wis., both dedicated their new worship facilities. WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., helped provide funding for both locations.

For more information on WELS Home Missions, visit wels.net/home-missions. ☩

WELS Benefit Plans announces limited open enrollment

The WELS VEBA Commission is announcing a limited open enrollment for the WELS VEBA Group Health Care Plan for the 2021 plan year. The limited open enrollment is available to eligible workers at sponsoring organizations with at least one active worker enrolled in medical benefits under the WELS VEBA health plan. Enrollment for health and dental plans will open on Nov. 2, 2020, and run through Nov. 30, 2020.

The WELS VEBA Commission has also announced the 2021 premium rates for WELS VEBA medical benefits will not change from the 2020 rates. The commission is pleased to provide this rate stability to help support WELS ministry efforts.

“WELS VEBA is purposefully designed for workers serving at WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod ministries. As a plan sponsored by a religious organization, WELS VEBA is

uniquely consistent with both God’s Word and the law,” says Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of WELS Benefit Plans.

Information regarding the 2021 limited open enrollment and WELS VEBA benefits and WELS VEBA health plan rates for 2021 are available on the Benefit Plans website at welsbpo.net.

In addition to steady health care rates, the WELS Benefits Plans Office has implemented a Pension Plan contribution holiday underway during the October 2020 quarter. No contributions were charged to calling bodies for pension benefits this quarter. Peterman says this is a savings of \$1,132 per full-time called worker and a total of about \$5 million in savings across all of WELS. In a difficult year for many WELS schools and churches, WELS Benefit Plans is able to offer this small relief to ministry work. ☩

New series highlights God’s guidance in life

A new series in *Forward in Christ* magazine (FIC) is highlighting how God works in the lives of everyday Christians.

“My Christian life” focuses on real-life blessings and challenges of WELS members and how God helps Christians through whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

Articles this year have highlighted adoption, mental illness, cancer, and