

**TOGETHER**



## New executive editor for *Forward in Christ*

October 4, 2022

**A**fter 16 years of faithful service as executive editor of *Forward in Christ*, Rev. John Braun has announced his retirement, effective Dec. 31. During those 16 years, Braun has overseen a number of improvements in the synod's official magazine. We are grateful for his service and pray for God's blessings in his retirement.

Rev. James Pope has accepted the call from the Conference of Presidents to succeed Braun as executive editor. Pope will be installed tomorrow, Wed., Oct. 5, during the regular fall meeting of the Conference of Presidents at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis. Braun will continue in his role until the end of December, but Pope will begin work immediately, working with Braun to enable a smooth transition.

Pope was born and raised in Racine, Wis., the youngest of three boys. He received his education at Northwestern Prep (1973), Northwestern College (1977), and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1981). He and his wife, Cathy, have two grown children, Ashley and Jeremy.

Pope brings a variety of experiences to his ministry. After graduating from the seminary, he was assigned to St. Matthew, Milwaukee, where he served 7 years. After that he served 12 years at Peace, Bradenton, Fla., before taking a call to Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., where he taught history, theology, and staff ministry courses. He retired from MLC in 2021.

Readers of *Forward in Christ* may recognize Pope's name because he served as a contributing editor to the magazine, writing the popular "Light for our path" column from 2014–2019. At the same time, he served WELS by answering questions submitted online through the synod's website.

The position of executive editor of *Forward in Christ* is a part-time position. Pope will also soon begin serving a six-month, part-time retirement call to St. Mark, Leesburg, Fla.

We pray that God will bless him as he carries out this important responsibility.

Serving with you in Christ,  
WELS President Mark Schroeder 

## WELS Christian Aid and Relief responds to Hurricane Ian

*Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida on Sept. 28 as a powerful Category 4 storm. Rev. Dan Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, provides an update on how WELS congregations were affected and on current relief efforts in those areas.*

On Oct. 3, 2022, a four-person assessment team from WELS Christian Aid and Relief arrived in Sarasota, Fla. They met with Rev. Marty Mielke, the secretary of the South Atlantic District and “point man” for disaster relief operations following Hurricane Ian. Mielke has been in regular communication with the pastors and congregational leaders in the district. He gave the team an overview of the situation in south Florida. The team plans to spend two days visiting WELS congregations in the area; assessing their needs; and planning the best ways to utilize money, volunteers, and other resources to help those who are affected.

Congregations to the north and in the immediate Tampa area received the least damage. WELS churches in Odessa, Tampa, Clearwater, Valrico, Seminole, and Parrish were largely untouched with only a few downed trees and light flooding. Risen Savior in Lakewood Ranch sustained significant roof damage. Ascension in Sarasota has some roof and soffit damage as well as a 40-foot palm tree on the roof.

Congregations and communities farther south were hit the hardest. At Prince of Peace in Englewood, the church’s cupola was breached, causing water to soak the sanctuary and pews. Christ the King in Port Charlotte received roof

and water damage, causing part of the ceiling to collapse. Bethany in North Fort Myers is going to need a new roof and has a large amount of downed timber and brush on the property. At Crown of Life in Fort Meyers the roof on the gymnasium was severely damaged and water entered the sanctuary. The church and school at Abiding Love in Cape Coral sustained roof damage; water also penetrated into the offices, hallways, classrooms, kitchen, and fellowship hall. Portions of the ceilings have collapsed.

We are happy to report that among our members, no injury or loss of life has been reported. Praise God for his mercy!

Many offers of help have come in from individuals and organizations across the synod. Thank you so much! Again, we ask for your patience as we prioritize and plan. The best way for you to help at this time is to give a financial gift. You can do that by going to **wels.net/CARgift** or mailing a check to WELS, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive, Waukesha, WI 53188, and designating your gift to “Disaster Relief.”

Small, local efforts to provide needed supplies and clear debris have begun. Christian Aid and Relief has already provided \$10,000 to the South Atlantic District to purchase supplies, generators, and tarps.

It would be easy to look at this disaster as only that—a terrible storm that caused tremendous damage and loss. If we take a closer look, we will see that the Lord is using Ian to remind us of what’s really important and to give us the opportunity to imitate the compassion of Christ as we love and serve one another and those around us. Please continue to pray. 

## Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary annual symposium held

Nearly 400 people attended Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s (WLS) annual fall symposium on Sept. 19-20, either virtually or on campus in Mequon, Wis. Attendees heard three papers presented on the topic of compassion ministry.

Dr. Keith Wessel, professor at Martin Luther College, presented an essay on the biblical basis for Christian compassion. Christ’s compassion for sinners, demonstrated in the sacrifice he offered for all, moved early Christians to love and serve their fellow believers. They may not have established a highly organized ministry of compassion, but their sincere love took concrete action to help those in need.

Dr. Glen Thompson, professor emeritus at Asia Lutheran Seminary, presented a historical overview of Christian compassion through the centuries—from Constantine to the present time. The Christian church historically showed compassion for the hurting because of Christ’s love for them, and not exclusively, or even primarily, as an opportunity to share the gospel with them. Too often, compassion ministry has been considered valuable only insofar as it serves as “a bridge to telling others about the Savior.” It may be that, but a Christian congregation wants to serve out of love for the neighbor, to the glory of God.

Rev. Ryan Kolander, pastor at Palabra de Vida Lutheran Church, Detroit, Mich., presented an essay on creating

a balanced culture of compassion in today’s current contexts of ministry. He addressed the pitfalls and fears facing those who desire to help the hurting in their community. Compassion ministry begins with listening to people and serving them in a responsible and meaningful way. The Lord has given us the opportunity to love others as he has loved us.

The archive of the Symposium essays is available at [wisluthsem.org](http://wisluthsem.org). 



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