

2013 Western Wisconsin District Conference

June 3-4 • Luther Prep School, Watertown, WI

Monday, June 3

9:02am The convention was called to order by President Prahll with a prayer and the singing of "God's Word is Our Great Heritage."

9:11am Pastor John Braun of Northwestern Publishing House addressed the delegates on the matter of Bible translations. He stated that there is much work to do together so that we remain united and so that this issue does not become divisive. He reminded the delegates that the translation issue is a matter of Christian freedom. After these initial comments he addressed three main issues:

The Copyright Issue: Copyright is intended to protect intellectual property "fixed in any tangible medium of expression." Copyright does not protect an idea. Copyright notice is not necessary to protect a work. Three copyright principles: (1) What's printed legally is printed - no change is needed (the *People's Bible* does not need to be changed to NIV 2011). (2) Electronic publication is the same as other forms of publication. (3) What you own is yours, but ownership does not mean permission. General use guidelines allow for some quoting of a Bible translation. The guidelines vary depending on the publisher. We can still use NIV 84 under general use guidelines for things like curriculum, *Forward in Christ*, *Meditations*, Lent and Christmas materials, etc. Commentaries, catechisms and other projects will present some challenges. Congregations can quote the NIV locally in bulletins and service folders.

The Financial Question: NPH is a self-funded operation. NPH profits are supposed to be put into producing new materials. NPH faces financial challenges: Congregations cutting back on purchases. Shrinking membership of congregations. Changing patterns of what people read and how they use their financial resources. Financial resources are shrinking.

Will the choice of a translation for NPH publication cause congregations to turn to other publishers? If this happens it could lead to price increases or fewer issues of NPH-produced publications. Congregations will also face challenges as they choose other publishers (doctrinal, financial, etc). There will always be unintended consequences. NPH needs WELS pastors, teachers, congregations and individuals to continue to purchase NPH materials for its continued existence.

The Choice Question: This decision should not be based on financial considerations. Eventually the WELS will need to abandon the NIV 84. Members and congregations will use the copies they have until they

become unusable. Soon schools will run out of copies of NIV 84 for their students. Families will be unable to purchase NIV 84 confirmation Bibles. Optimal Choice#1: All congregations, schools and WELS families agree on the use of a single translation for publishing and congregational use. Optimal Choice #2: All congregation agree to allow and use published materials with one translation or a variety of them while they may choose another for local use.

Some other questions: What about our own translation? Prof. Braun fears that it will not achieve widespread acceptance even in the WELS. He also stated that NPH does not have the financial resources to fund such a project. What about the catechism project? NPH is thinking in terms of using a single translation for a catechism. Other options may be developed.

The delegates were given the opportunity to ask questions of Pastor Braun.

- 10:14am Second Vice President Jerry Ewings guided the delegates through the BORAM.
- 10:37am Pastor Mark Schroeder gave the synod president's report. In three weeks the synod administration will move into the new administration building which will be called the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. Home missions plans to open about 8 new missions in the coming year. What a blessing! Construction has begun on MLC's early childhood center. The Commission for Congregational Counseling is up and running. Pastor Jonathan Hein is the administrator. He will remain a parish pastor. Pastor Michael Schultz has been called to be the director of the new hymnal project. It looks like WELS, because of the faithful stewardship of our people, will be able to expand gospel ministry in the next biennium. Pastor Schroeder stated that it is a blessing to consider the translation issue that is so prevalent on our minds at this time. The COP has authorized a special offering to pay down the synodical debt, in an attempt to pay off the debt 3 years earlier than first predicted (2015 instead of 2018). The \$22 million debt has already been reduced to \$8 million in five years. Recent informal talks have taken place between the WELS, ELS and LC-MS. These are people that we should be talking to and these discussions will continue. CPH contacted Pastor Schroeder stating that if the WELS moves forward with a confessional Lutheran Bible translation CPH wants to be a part of it. This would be cooperation in externals and not a fellowship issue.
- 10:50am The convention adjourned for the worship service in the chapel. Pastor Wayne Mueller preached on Hebrews 4:12-14.

- 1:40pm After an uplifting and edifying service and satisfying lunch the convention reconvened. Pastor Prah! made a few announcements regarding convention business and opened the afternoon session with a brief prayer.
- 1:45pm A Pew-Level View of Four Translation Options was presented by Pastors Curt Backhaus (ESV), Brett Brauer (HCSB), Dan Iwinski (NIV 2011) and Karl Walther (WELS translation). See the convention files and district website (welswwd.weebly.com) for copies of the presentations. Pastor Prah! thanked the presenters.
- 2:45pm Break
- 3:05pm Pastor Prah! called the convention back to order and gave the district president's report.
- 3:20pm Pastor Jim Mattek from WLCFS presented on distance counseling.
- 3:42pm Several rapid reports were given.
- 3:50pm The delegates were dismissed for circuit breakout discussions on the BORAM and translation issue and for supper.
- 6:50pm The convention reconvened with a devotion led by Pastor Terry Rich.
- 7:04pm Pastor Mike Jensen summarized the TFC report. Pastor John Braun summarized the TEC report.
- 7:15pm An open forum / Q & A session was offered. The various presenters from the convention answered questions from the delegates about their presentations and the translation issue. One interesting question that was asked: In evaluating NIV 2011 which was considered more important - faithfulness to the original or readability? Pastor Braun answered, "Yes!" Pastor Nathan Strutz made the point that our publications are mostly directed at children (catechism, Sunday school materials, etc). This makes readability and ease of memorization an important issue. A number of brothers commented about the need to foster unity among us throughout this whole discussion. Pastor Jerry Ewings stated that we would be served well by choosing the ESV which has an excellent resource in the *Lutheran Study Bible*. Many fine questions were asked. Lots of information was shared.
- 8:45pm The convention was adjourned for the evening with prayer.
- The district presidium met with the circuit pastors to discuss the district translation ballot.

Tuesday, June 4

- 8:30am The convention was called to order by President Prah. Pastor Galen Riediger led the opening devotion based on Titus 1:5,9.
- 8:46am Pastor Prah introduced and explained the ballot that will be distributed to the delegates for the vote on the translation issue. The vote was taken.
- 9:00am Pastor Keith Free reported on behalf of WELS Home Missions. Pastor Nathan Strutz reported on behalf of the District Mission Board.
- 9:12am Mr. Mark Schulz presented the World Mission report on behalf of Pastor Dan Koelpin who is in Thailand. Pastor Koelpin is retiring effective June 30. Pastor Larry M. Schlomer, the new administrator for the WELS Board for World Missions, was introduced to the assembly.
- 9:40am Pastor John Braun presented info on the 100th anniversary of *Forward in Christ*. A DVD highlighting the celebration was shown.
- 9:51am Mr. Joshua Peterman spoke on behalf of WELS VEBA, specifically addressing the Affordable Healthcare Act. WELS VEBA will continue into the future in compliance both with the law and with our religious confession.
- 10:17am Results of the ballot were given. 348 ballots were cast. On Question #1: NIV 2011 received 67 votes. The eclectic approach received 206 votes. 71 voted neither. There were 4 abstentions. On Question #2: ESV received 104 votes. HCSB received 4 votes. NIV 2011 received 72 votes. Eclectic received 164 votes. On Question #3: 295 voted that synod should move forward with a translation project. 53 voted that synod should not move forward with such a project.
- 10:20am Break
- 10:48am The convention reconvened. Mr. Art Tessmann and Mr. Todd Poppe reported on Synodical Council and synod finances.
- 11:09am Pastor Matt Crass reported on WELS worker training.
- 11:16am Pastor Prah suggested and a motion was made that we send the convention offering of \$2,283.16 to the Western Wisconsin District Scholarship Fund. The motion was approved.

11:20am Pastor Prah1 thanked the delegates for their attendance and attention. He encouraged them to report highlights of the convention to their church councils and congregations.

11:21am A motion was made to adjourn after the devotion. The motion passed.

11:22am Pastor Paul Schultz led the closing devotion based on 2 Timothy 4:1-3.

Statistics: 445 in attendance / 462 registered / 37 excused / 147 stayed in dorm

Convention Offering: **\$2,283.16**

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Daniel Sims
District Secretary