

2015 Western Wisconsin District Conference

June 8-9 • Luther Prep School, Watertown, WI

Monday, June 8

- 9:00am The conference began with a communion service in the LPS chapel. Three presidents who served on the Watertown campus led the service. President John Braun was the preacher. President Matthew Crass was the presiding minister. President Mark Schroeder was the lector.
- 10:34am President Pahl called the conference to order. He thanked a number of people for their service to the district. He explained the purpose of the conference. We are here to confer, encourage and share information.
- 10:38am Synod President Mark Schroeder addressed the assembly. He encouraged the group to continue to proclaim law and gospel in a changing world trusting in the Lord's gracious promises. He updated the conference on the current state of the synod. Slow and careful expansion of our synodical work continues. God continues to provide workers for his church through our synodical schools. The effort to retire our capital debt continues. God continues to shower WELS with his gracious blessings. President Schroeder also mentioned a revision of a paper on marriage and divorce to help pastors better deal with the challenges faced by the members of their churches today. WELS continues to have informal yet encouraging discussions with the LCMS. More formal doctrinal discussion have begun with the CLC. Pres. Schroeder believes we are in agreement on the principles of fellowship. However, there are still differences in application.
- 11:05am John Braun and Bill Ziche reported on behalf of NPH. NPH views customers as souls whom they are trying to reach with God's Word. New resources are constantly being developed. Some highlights include commentaries on Romans 9-16, 1 and 2 Peter and Jude and a basic doctrine book entitled *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine*. New *ChristLight* materials are being made available. The Hymnal Project continues. NPH will be printing translations produced by the Wartburg Project. Mr. Ziche encouraged the group to display NPH materials prominently in their schools and churches. Pastor Braun stated that the 500th anniversary of the reformation in 2017 will provide an excellent opportunity to review our Lutheran heritage and give thanks to God for this blessings given through it. Boettcher-Trinklein, producers of the *WELS Connection*, have received a Thrivent grant, for the production of a Luther documentary to air on PBS in September of 2017. A number of older titles on Luther and other reformation topics will be re-released by NPH. Some new titles will be produced as well including a new version of Luther's Small Catechism and a video Bible study on the Reformation.

NPH will also be producing resources to help congregations reach out with the gospel during the Reformation celebration.

- 11:38am Pastor Larry Schlomer reported on behalf of WELS World Missions. Our mission field is the largest ever in existence. Currently the world has 7 billion people. Before long it will be 8 billion. The Lord is laying many opportunities before us all over the world.
- 11:53am Pastor Nathan Strutz reported on behalf of WELS Home Missions. He encouraged everyone to attend the Home Missions Conference on October 27-28, 2015 in the Dells.
- 12:00pm The conference was recessed for lunch.
- 1:37pm Pastor Josh Bodden led the afternoon devotion under the theme “Faith is God’s Gift to Trust in Christ and His Work.”
- 1:50pm Pastor Prahm gave the district president’s report. He encouraged the assembly to use this summer to build themselves up in Christ’s strength, because we are all going to need it.
- 2:00pm A representative from Conquerors through Christ talked about the dangers of pornography and the resources available for combatting this insidious attack of the devil. There are other ministries out there doing similar work but Conquerors through Christ is uniquely gospel focused.
- 2:12pm Pastor Mike Jensen encouraged the assembly to carefully read through the BORAM.
- 2:18pm Pastor Jerry Ewings presented the Lutheran confessional study of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. His paper was accepted with thanks.
- 3:33pm Break
- 3:50pm Pastor Kurt Lueneberg reported on behalf of the Ministry of Christian Giving.
- 4:00pm Individual circuits met for the Bible study entitled *By Faith Alone* authored by Pastor G. Philip Arnold of St. Matthew in Stoddard, WI for our use at this conference.

Tuesday, June 9

- 8:30 Devotion opened the day with Greg Lyon leading on a devotion on the general theme *Faith Takes God at His Word*.

8:40 Pastor Prah! mentioned Pastor Joe Fricke was not with us this morning because of a recent bicycle accident. Joe is recovering and Pastor Prah! on behalf of the district extended God's blessings to Joe. He also excused our district secretary, Pastor Dan Sims, due to illness.

8:45 With a slight agenda change LPS President Matt Crass was introduced to give the Ministerial Education report.

President Crass reported on various blessings and efforts WLS, MLS, LPS and MLC. It was noted that LPS has 24 graduating seniors enrolling in MLC's pastoral track this fall and MLC looks to have a total of 60+ pastor track freshmen this coming year.

LPS continues to celebrate its 150th Anniversary. The celebration includes an offering that will go toward the renovation of the chapel and its organ . On November 15, 2015 at 3PM LPS will hold its 150th Anniversary service with choirs from all Ministerial Education schools participating.

President Crass concluded his comments with encouragement for all pastors and teachers, whatever their situation in ministry, to encourage young men and woman to pursue the gospel ministry.

The floor was opened for questions for President Crass. From the floor Pastor Ed Lindemann passionately encouraged that we all focus on the issue of the high cost of tuition, especially at MLC, with the concern that we are asking our students to bear too much of the burden of the cost, a cost that would be better distributed over the entire synod rather than on backs of the students. He further encourage the recruitment of young men for the pastoral ministry. He pleaded that we somehow, someway address the issue of tuition. In his comments he referenced p. 122 of the BoRaM.

8:55 Pastor Doug Tomhave, a member of our synod's Commission on Evangelism, gave the district evangelism report on behalf of Joe Fricke. He highlighted the School of Outreach, which is constantly improving and adapting, and the Mission Mindset Seminars, which are a circuit level opportunity to access evangelism opportunities in each circuit's area.

Pastor Tomhave passed along Pastor Fricke's observation that half the population of the WWD's geographical area remains unchurched. With these numbers before us Pastor Fricke encourages us all to look for opportunities in our communities. We were encouraged to contact Pastor Fricke with any questions or needs.

Pastor Tomhave also highlighted numerous items from the synod level Commission on Evangelism:

- Our website “What about Jesus?”
- The annual Evangelism Day at MLC which strives to give ministerial candidates an evangelism mindset
- The upcoming movie release of *My Son, My Savior* which is scheduled for release this fall.
- A synod level effort to better equip our high school students to reach out to their generational peers, an effort that includes listening to our youth and seeing what tools we can offer as assistance.

The floor was opened for questions. Pastor John Braun thanked Pastor Tomhave for mentioning the movie *My Son, My Savior*. He mentioned that they just finished filming in Cedarburg and hope to have it released in October 2015 in time for outreach use at Christmas.

9:05

Our District Worship Coordinator, Pastor Rich Lehmann, began his report by encouraging all to read the Worship Report which is included in the conference binder.

He then introduced the topic of our District’s own possible celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017. The goal would be to have a District wide celebration in Madison, similar to our District’s celebration of the synod’s 150th Anniversary. A location that’s being considered is the Alliant Center in Madison which would cost between \$12,000 and \$15,000 for our event. The committee envisions a service in which there were children’s, youth and adult choirs made up of individuals from across the District. There would also be busing costs to consider. Pastor Lehmann reported that he’s been exploring different sources of funding as possibilities to cover costs and subsidize transportation, etc.

One major consideration for our District as we plan this celebration is the timing and nature of synod wide celebrations in the fall of 2017 and how they would impact our plans. An additional consideration is the 50th Anniversary of WELS National Choral Fest in LaCrosse in early November 2017.

Pastor Lehman sought feedback from the floor regarding the issues of funding and a possible date for our District celebration. Questions were asked about date, time of day, funding, seating capacity, other districts’ plans. Pastor Glenn Schmeige encouraged the committee to look at the Sunday, November 5th date. District President Prah reflected on the blessing the 150th Synod Anniversary has been and encouraged that

feedback be sought from the District Conferences this fall. Pastor Andrew Schultz suggested that information could be sent and sought via the Circuit Pastors.

9:20 Pastor Jensen opened the floor for BoRam discussion of the conference's choosing.

Several individuals encourage discussion of the new/revised Christ-light materials

Pastor Ed Lindemann again spoke on the topic of student indebtedness. Prof. Ron Hahm rose to speak to the issue as well, expressing concern that we might be pricing lower income families out of the ministry. President Matt Crass intimated that the cost issue seems to be mainly for the students at MLC. Pastor Jensen responded that years back we charted a course that took a great deal of synodical assistance away from MLC because it was thought that the college students could receive government assistance. He then wondered about the probability of the government withdrawing assistance to our school as we continue to stand on Scripture's teaching regarding gender.

9:26 Mr. Todd Poppe, WELS Chief Financial Officer, reported on behalf of the Synodical Council (SC). He reflected on where we were as a synod financially in 2005 and thanked the Lord that we are now in a financial position to actually look at more ministerial opportunities.

Mr. Poppe proceeded to give an overview of the membership, structure and responsibilities of the SC. He mentioned that in the past the SC's Finance Committee had made allocations of funds; this is now part of the Ministry Committee's work so that ministry, not finances, is driving the mission.

Mr. Poppe then gave an overview of the SC's BoRaM report.

- Financial Plan– We are and seek to remain financially sound with available resources available equal to the ministry planned.
- CMO remains flat, but still remains the bedrock of our financial support for ministry.
- Elimination of the capital indebtedness is a goal. The debt has been lowered to \$4.7million from \$22 million in 2007. deb (4.7million of 22 million from 2007
- The current financial plan foresees strategic use of reserves, with CMO again being the bedrock.
- The Financial Stabilization Fund has worked well

Mr. Poppe closed his presentation with a prayer.

District President Prahel opened the floor for questions. Pastor Mark Wessel asked a question about the increase in insurance rates. A question was also asked regarding the government's insurance rebate program. Mr. Poppe encouraged visiting the WELS VEBA site for information as the government has determined that congregations using WELS VEBA are not eligible for that rebate.

Pastor Ed Lindemann spoke and thanked God for the work that Mr. Poppe and his staff have done to bring us to the current financial structure and situation. He encouraged that we all look at the capital improvement needs that are facing the synod and encouraged a clear plan for all to see. Mr. Poppe thanked Pastor Lindemann for his comments and extended great thanks to his dedicated staff and the SC.

Pastor Luke Werre rose to ask a question of Mr. Poppe: Is NPH a subsidiary corporation of WELS or not? Mr. Poppe answered: Yes, and so is MLC, etc. when we speak in legal terms. From a ministry point of view, NPH (and MLC, etc.) is a ministry of the synod. Pastor Werre cautioned: We should be aware how it is defined in our synod constitution, lest we change how we view it.

From the floor Pastor Jerry Ewings rejoiced that ministry is driving finances. He noted that 1/3 of the synod budget comes from students and remembered a time in the past when people lamented that 1/10 of our budget came from student tuition. He offered encouragement to bring more money to ministerial education to bring down the cost of tuition. Mr. Poppe responded that it's a struggle, but the collaboration between Ministerial Education and Home & World Missions has never been better.

Pastor Bill Bader asked the questions: Has the CMO seen its better day? Is it flat lining because of gifts from other sources? Mr. Poppe responded: CMO seems to have been impacted by recent economic issues, but he hopes it will rebound.

10:15 Break

10:30 Pastor Brett Brauer, a member of our synod's Translation Liaison Committee, gave an overview of TLC report in the BoRaM.

10:43 Mr. Lee Hitter, Director of WELS Communication Services, highlighted the communication options that will be coming out of synod convention. He also mentioned the July 13 soft launch of WELS.net mobile platform. He encouraged the brothers to contact him and his office if you are expecting negative media coverage for any reason.

10:45 **Rapid Reports – from floor mics**

Board of Supper – Pastor Jensen
 Calvary Academy – no oral report
 Campus Ministry – No report
*Pr Prahl encouraged getting names of students to the proper
 Campus Ministry rep.*
 Constitution Committee – Ken Ewardt
 District Scholarship Fund – Galen Riediger
 District Treasury Report – report in binder
 Human Resources – no report
Pastor Prahl gave Maurer’s name and phone number
 Institution Ministries – no oral report
 LACE – no oral report
 Planned Giving – Jerry Heckman
 The Lutheran Home – no oral report
 Church Extension Fund – no oral report
 Kingdom Workers – no oral report
 WELS Technology – Pr Prahl reported: *Old pastor/teacher database is
 being phased out; new one begins next week*
 WELS VEBA – no oral report, *Todd Poppe references in his report*
 WLCFS – Jim Mattek

- 11:02 Rapid Reports – concluded
- 11:03 Motion of Thanks to entire LPS staff and in particular Roger Kobleske.
- 11:04 Designation of Offering
Motion M/S/C to give offering to LPS 150th Anniversary Committee
- 11:07 Prof. Emeritus Erhard Opsahl spoke passionately about a new congregation level ministry, Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG). He shared the following information regarding Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and the military (but also made it quite clear that PTSD also impacts other first responders like firemen, policemen, EMTs, etc.)
- 22 veterans kill themselves every day (84 per week)
 - Over half of those suicides are over the age of 55
 - A main source of PTSD seems to be when you lose a comrade in arms.

LMSG Lutheran Military Support Group

Purpose:

- To share the gospel
- To serve as an auxiliary to WELS Military Service
- To provide a network for fellowship/support
- To care for the needs of former and current military and first responders, and their families in their walk of faith

LMSG hope to roll out in November 2015

At the end of Prof. Opsahl's report, the entire conference thanked him with a standing ovation.

11:25 District President Prah1 offered closing encouragement for recruitment that involved personal conversation with those in whom you sense the gifts and desire.

11:26 Pastor Prah1 called for a motion to adjourn the conference. Motion M/S/P.

11:28 Closing Devotion was led by Pastor Bob Wasserman under the general theme *Faith Lives for Christ who Lived and Died for Me*.

Convention Offering: **\$1,205.00**

Respectfully submitted,
Pastor Daniel Sims
District Secretary
(with special assistance from Pastor Mike Jensen)