

Dear brothers in Christ,

“Let Us Draw Near to God”

It is an undeserved privilege to greet you *in person* and welcome you to our WELS Western Wisconsin District Convention. “Coming out of COVID,” we again realize it is a privilege to together draw near to God in Christ. It is a privilege to spur one another on as we hear how God is blessing His work among us, despite whatever else is going on in this fallen, dying world.

But make no mistake, this privilege is undeserved. Ultimately, we do not gather today because a pandemic has ended, gathering restrictions have been dropped, and we somehow navigated the last two years. No, our gathering as brothers is underserved, an undeserved gift from a gracious God. The only gathering event we deserved by nature, a gathering in hell, God has cancelled by the hellish suffering of His Son on the cross. And, now we gather in Jesus’ name, as His brothers, looking forward to His eternal, heavenly gathering.

Our collective prayer is that these past years have been years of repentance, despairing of our control and strength, and instead finding our greatest strength and joy in Jesus alone. Cherishing the unity Jesus gives, let us never take for granted the undeserved privilege to gather, worship, and encourage one another in Christ. To Him be the glory and praise!

“Let Us Consider How to Spur One Another On Toward Love and Good Deeds”

This encouragement from Hebrews 10 summarizes well the work of our convention. Through presentation and report we will again consider the gospel work we do together in our synod, district, congregations, and schools.

Spurring One Another On...toward Gospel Nurture and Outreach

Compared to other visible church bodies, we are relatively small. Yet, upon this “little flock” the Lord has poured out grace upon grace, blessing upon blessing. One of the highlights of any convention is hearing about the amazing work the Spirit is doing in our congregations, schools, home and world mission fields, publications, and Ministerial Education schools.

We thank in advance all who will bring news of God’s amazing work in so many different areas of our district and synod. Plenary reporting time is limited because of our tight agenda, but all reports will be posted on our district website in the 2022 convention folder: <https://welswwd.weebly.com/2022-district-convention.html> Please take the time to review these important materials also.

Among those additional reports you’ll find information from our WELS Affiliated Ministries (historically known as parasynodicals). Some of these ministries also have booths in the entryway. We cherish our partnership with these ministries and welcome them to our convention. *Thank you for joining us and for all you do!* Brothers, please be sure to review their reports in your online district convention folder.

Spurring One Another On...in Love and Good Deeds for All

As members of Christ's body, we are His voice to proclaim His eternal gospel of mercy. Motivated by His mercy, we are also His hands to show mercy to all. Some in our district have started mercy or compassion ministries that care for people and provide opportunities to share Christ's eternal compassion. For more district info, please contact the district office.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief has always been a compassion ministry. Currently they are assisting with other compassion initiatives, including offering a grant program to help congregations get started <https://wels.net/serving-others/christian-aid-relief/community-care-and-compassion-matching-grants-program/> For more info please contact Pastor Dan Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, at 414-256-3204 or daniel.sims@wels.net.

Let us consider how in our congregations we can spur one another in this love and these good deeds!

Spurring One Another On...in the Need for Called Servants

As the need for called servants increases so do our prayers and efforts. "Dear Lord of the Harvest, send forth workers. Dear Jesus, bless our faithful efforts!"

2022 May Assignment & Vacancy Update

On behalf of the Assignment Committee and Conference of Presidents (COP), Ministerial Education Administrator Paul Prange gives a good overview.

Teachers - Martin Luther College (MLC)

At MLC this year, there were 74 (92 in 2021, 120 in 2020) teacher candidates who could go anywhere (57 from the graduating class and 17 from previous years), and all of them were assigned. In addition, 51 teacher candidates who were limited geographically received Calls for a total of 125 candidates assigned (168 in 2021, 150 in 2020). After the Assignment Committee met, there were ***still at least 140 total vacancies for teacher-trained men and women*** synod-wide (at least 90 at this time in 2021, at least 50 at this time in 2020). Of those 140, 116 had brought Calls to the Assignment Committee that went unfilled.

At MLC, 48 men graduated in the preseminary program (35 in 2021, 40 in 2020), 47 with a Bachelor of Arts degree (33 in 2021, 39 in 2020) and 1 with Seminary Certification (2 in 2021, 1 in 2020).

Pastors - Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

In the Assignment Committee at WLS this year, there were 90 requests for candidates (74 in 2021, 57 in 2020). There were 27 candidates available (33 in 2021, 26 in 2020), and all of them were assigned, so 63 of those Calls were unfilled (41 in 2021, 31 in 2020). Of those 27 candidates, 25 were seniors receiving their first Call and 2 were from previous classes. In addition, 5 men was reassigned to one-year Calls. After the Assignment Committee did its work, there were ***still 136 vacancies for pastor-trained men*** synod-wide (95 in 2021, 87 in 2020), an 11% vacancy rate.

Given our current vacancy numbers and upcoming retirements, we estimate the new normal range of district pastoral vacancies will be the high 20s to low 30s.

Spurring One Another On...with New Approaches to Ministry

COP Task Force on Teacher Needs

MLC already has in place action plans to address the growing teacher needs. At its May meeting in Mequon the COP also created a task force that will involve the COP, our Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS), MLC and those in the field. The task force is charged with both assessing our current and future teacher needs and offering concrete options for meeting those needs. The plan is to have at least an initial report by this October. Please remember these efforts in your prayers.

Proactive Discussion regarding Pastoral Service

As we look ahead, we thank the Lord for some larger classes that will be graduating from our seminary. Still, the overall vacancy trend will likely continue, at least for the foreseeable future.

In response, some district congregations have considered becoming dual parishes. Some have considered going multisite (one congregation with multiple sites that once were individual congregations). Another option would be several congregations or perhaps a circuit creating a consolidated ministry package of several pastors, perhaps a staff minister, etc. There is also opportunity for larger multi-pastor congregations to consider staff ministry positions instead of a second or third pastor.

Let us consider how we can spur one another on in these discussions, respecting each congregation's history and needs but also considering how we might work together in gospel proclamation.

Spurring One Another On...in Caring for Called Workers

Concern for Increasing Ministerial Needs

Our called servants wear many hats. Whether it be the increasing pressures of society, family or the pressures created by classroom or congregational vacancies, many of our teachers, principals, staff ministers, pastors and circuit pastors are being stretched thin. "Dear Jesus, grant them strength. Do not allow Satan or weariness to rob them of their joy in service!" Let us consider how God might make us an answer to that prayer. Let us consider how we might in love and good deeds support and strengthen these servants.

Mental Healthcare for Called Workers and Their Families

Member Assistance Program

Our synod has had a long ministerial partnership with Christian Family Solutions (CFS, historically know as Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services). CFS has focused a large portion of its effort on providing Christian counseling services with much of that through secure video counseling. In addition to accepting payments through eligible health insurance plans, CFS offers congregations a program by which they can economically prepurchase and provide counseling service to members. Our district encourages congregations to consider caring for your members *and* called workers by establishing your own MAP with CFS. The first step is to contact the MAP Coordinator, ***Dan Nommensen, by calling 800.438.1772***. He will discuss the program implementation process and get your organization set up as quickly as possible.

Several years back our district established its own MAP with CFS, allowing any called worker or his/her immediate family member to have prepaid, anonymous, immediate access to three counseling sessions with more session possible based upon the recommendation of the counselor and available funds. The gospel motivated rationale is simple: Called worker families are not immune to such needs. We love and want to care for these dear servants and their families. We want called workers to receive help quickly at the onset of a struggle, thus strengthening them for their lives in Christ and for continued gospel service.

So far, our district MAP has been covered by district dues. In fact, besides the MAP, district dues only cover small miscellaneous expenses like district mailings (increasingly rare in this digital age). Each year our district MAP usage has increased, and available funds are diminishing.

District Dues Floor Committee

District dues have been at \$20 (per male called worker) for at least twenty years and until now there was no need to raise them. At their April meeting our district's Circuit Pastors determined to ask for dues of \$50 (per male called worker) so that the district called worker MAP services would continue. It is appropriate that the ultimate decision regarding district dues be determined by the district in convention. To that end, our convention has a District Dues floor committee. This committee may recommend a dollar amount and/or further study in the months to come considering the increasing usage of the MAP. We thank the floor committee in advance for their work.

Ad Hoc Committee

In addition to establishing the floor committee to consider district dues, in April our Circuit Pastors determined to form a district *ad hoc* committee to consider proactive approaches to care for the mental health needs of our district's called workers and their families. This committee will begin its work in late summer/early fall. Please pray for the committee's work and for all who will be served through this effort. One way your congregation can immediately help is by contacting CFS and establishing your own congregational MAP.

Called Worker Compensation

Caring and supporting our called workers also involves our compensation packages. How we together compensate these gifts from Jesus is a significant way we show appreciation to Christ and these servants. The rising teaching and preaching vacancies give us all opportunity to cherish these servants and review our care.

Synod code has been established as fair and equitable compensation. It has recommended levels of support for base compensation, housing, SECA reimbursement, health insurance, etc. The WELS Compensation Calculator is a quick, handy resource to review how your congregation or school is doing: <https://cwcompcalc.wels.net/> The complete compensation guideline can be found at <https://cwcompcalc.wels.net/assets/WELSCompensationGuidelines.pdf>

Spurring One Another On...through Congregational and School Ministry Tools

On WELS.net our synod's many agencies have a wealth of ministerial resources, devotions, etc. ready for your use. Below is just a small sampling.

- Our Commission on Lutheran Schools
<https://wels.net/serving-you/christian-life/education/lutheran-schools/>
- The Foundation – “Your One Stop Worship Resource Shop”
<https://welscongregationalservices.net/the-foundation/>
- Women's Ministry Conference and Resources
 - Won to Be One Conference – Here at LPS – July 21-23, 2022
 - Resources: <https://wm.welsrc.net/>
 - *Please share these with your congregation and sisters in Christ.*

Spurring One Another On...by Structuring for Service

Video Meetings and Constitutional Bylaws

The pandemic made us resourceful in doing the Lord's work. For many congregational in-person meetings gave way to online video meetings. For convenience's sake some may wish to continue such video meetings. If you wish to do so you may need to revise your constitutional bylaws to ensure your congregation is functioning within its constitutional requirements. If you wish to consider such changes, please remember that all constitutional revisions are to be approved by the district constitutional committee prior to adoption by a congregation's voters assembly. This can be done by contacting Pastor Daniel Iwinski, the chairman of our district constitutional committee (dciwinski@hotmail.com).

A Large Circuit Becomes a New Conference

To spur one another on with more opportunities for conference papers, devotions, etc., the Capitol Circuit (currently a member of the Central Conference) has requested to become a separate, new conference, the Capitol Conference. The discussions and communication have been most brotherly with no objections. At their April meeting the Circuit Pastors determined the best way to deal with this request and recommendation was as part of this report.

Therefore, brothers, the recommendation is on the floor for the Capitol Circuit of the Central Conference to now become the Capitol Conference of the WELS Western Wisconsin District.

“Let Us Hold Unswervingly to the Hope We Profess”

Holding fast to Christ and all He gives means holding fast to His Word and all it teaches.

God's Beautiful and Balanced Design for Male and Female

As mentioned in an April *Together* email correspondence, the COP is planning to have this final draft available later this summer. It is important to note that this work was begun and is presented as a reiteration of our 1993 confession, since God's Biblical teaching on male and female does not change. When it is published, please give it your study time and attention in the months to come.

Pastoral Letter on Christian Freedom

This letter from the COP encourages all to cherish the real and precious freedom we have in Christ and encourages further Bible Study of this precious gift. <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&refresh=61e5dcc9dd3721642454217&ind=1642454100685&filename=SA-PastoralLetteronChristianFreedom-01172022.pdf>

“Let Us Encourage One Another...and All the More as You See the Day Approaching”

Encouragement to Our Congregational Leaders

As I was working on the final version of this district report, I received a phone call from Chip Wilke, one of the pastors at St. Paul, Adams & Mauston. He informed me, that morning (6/3/22) their congregational chairman, Judge Emeritus John “Jack” Roemer, was shot and killed by a home-intruder, who apparently targeted Jack because of his service as a judge. (By now I'm sure many of you have seen the media coverage.)

Having had the privilege to meet and talk with Judge Roemer on several occasions, he was obviously a truly gentle spirit in whom the Spirit had worked a deep care and concern for Christ's people and ministry. Following the death of his wife, St. Paul's and its gospel work had become Jack's daily focus.

“Dear Jesus, have mercy on all. We thank You for your gospel of peace and mercy that You planted deeply in the heart of Your dear servant, Judge Roemer. We thank You for the gentle spirit You gave him with its deep concern for the lost, the members of his flock and servant’s entrusted to St. Paul’s congregation. We thank You most of all, that thanks to Your suffering and death, he is now with You in glory. Be with his family and the family of believers at St. Paul, Mauston and Adams. Encourage them with the blessed resurrection reunion You have in store. Amen.”

Dear congregational delegates, thank you for serving at this convention and in your congregations. Like Jack, your lives and service are on the frontline of faithful Christian witness no matter what your location or vocation. Like Jack, we thank God for your dedicated work in your families, congregations, and communities. We thank the Spirit for moving the members of all our congregations to faithful, joyful service that is so desperately needed.

As we face an ever-increasing outlash against all that is good, especially against the goodness of our Savior God, let us spur one another on toward faithfulness and faithful witness to Christ’s gospel, remembering that Christ is faithful and He has promised: *your labor in the Lord is never in vain.*

Encouragement to Christ’s Called Servants

We offer to Christ the same thanks for all the called servants of our district...with a special “Thank you!” to our retirees who continue to help in classrooms and pulpits. To those celebrating anniversaries in the ministry, congratulations and Lord’s blessings to you and to your spouses and families who have supported you in your service. To those retiring from fulltime gospel service, thank you and God bless you in this next phase of service to Jesus. In the spirit of Hebrews 13, we remember you. (The biennium’s call activity, deaths, anniversaries, etc. is available under the president’s report at <https://welswwd.weebly.com/2022-district-convention.html>)

In that same spirit we remember our departed called servants. In a moment we will do just that, as we resume our district’s long-honored custom of singing “For All the Saints” to thank Christ for our dearly departed gospel servants. While much could be said about each of these dear souls, permit me a few brief comments about one, our former District President Herb Prah, called home by the Lord on March 30th.

The Spirit gave Pastor Prah a heart that beat with gospel energy and optimism. As much as he enjoyed his service to our district as president from 1993 until 2016, his heart was always in the parish, a trait that made him such a caring pastor to us all.

We praise Christ that Herb is now in glory awaiting the glorious resurrection. We thank God for making him a wonderful gospel-proclaiming gift to his family, his St. Mark’s, Eau Claire congregation and us. We continue to remember his wife Char and their family in our prayers.

Now, in thanks to Christ for all our departed gospel servants we rise to sing “For All the Saints.”

Rev. Herb Prah Memorial Service – July 8th

A memorial service for Pastor Prah will be held on Friday, July 8, 2022, at St. Mark, Eau Claire, WI at 11am.

Visitation will take place at least one hour prior to the service and the night before (7/7) at a TBD time.

A noon luncheon will follow the memorial service. To help with food preparation those planning to attend this luncheon are asked to RSVP at church@stmark-wels.org

Christ’s servant to you,

Pastor Michael Jensen

District President

WELS Western Wisconsin District