

Report of the Western Wisconsin District Ad hoc Committee for Called Worker Mental Health

At the Western Wisconsin District Convention in June of 2022, there were [three papers presented](#) on how to serve the people of our congregations after COVID. These presentations sparked discussion among the members of the district praesidium, but they weren't the only factor under consideration. We have been blessed as a district to be a part of the Christian Family Solutions' (CFS) Member Assistance Program (MAP). Since COVID, the number of called workers in our district using MAP has risen dramatically. Additionally, our synod has seen unusually high numbers of resignations. Regarding teachers, even though the mentoring for new teachers had been in place for almost a decade, resignations were happening at an alarming rate, both pre- and post-COVID. It's reasonable to say that COVID exposed some weaknesses and challenges among us, especially regarding the well-being of called workers, our awareness of such challenges, as well as our response or lack of paying attention to what was going on around us.

In light of all these things and out of concern for our called workers, the district presidium resolved to appoint an ad hoc committee to address these issues. The district second vice-president, Pastor Jeff Seelow, was appointed as chairman of this committee. The members who were asked to serve on this committee are called workers who have encountered in one way or another the negative impact of struggling with well-being and, in some cases, a lack of support in the struggle.

The committee first met in August of 2022. The Committee has met more than two dozen times discussing and evaluating the situation in an attempt to get a handle on what appeared to be a concern deserving of our attention.

Dan Nommensen of Christian Family Solutions was an important resource early on and continues to serve as an advisory member. Along the way, the committee benefited from conversations with Steve Granberg of Grace in Action and Karen Fischer of CFS who was heading the Resilience Project, and has since accepted a Call to Wisconsin Lutheran College.

One of the first things the committee did was to put together a presentation to take to all the conferences of the district. Members of the committee presented

around the district and received important feedback and input from these gatherings. These meetings took place in early 2023.

This feedback narrowed our focus. We realized that there was a need to define mental health and find out what the experiences of our called workers have been. We decided to create a survey and enlisted the help of a consultant to write it. We handed it out at the district teachers conference this February and a majority of teachers took the survey. We are also handing it out to pastors now at this convention. We kindly ask that you take this survey and in this way help us in our work.

The results of the survey that we've seen so far confirm that the mental health and well-being of our called workers is a real issue that Christian love compels us to address as pastors, teachers, and congregations. A resolution has been given to this convention's floor committee (see attached) tasked with this issue. It is our hope that it will be brought to this convention floor and approved so that we may, in an ongoing fashion, offer assistance to individuals and congregations with the result, by God's grace, that our workers and their congregations and schools will find joy and encouragement in their ministry as they serve for the salvation of souls.

Pastor Jeffrey Seelow, Chairman

Pastor Peter Snyder, Secretary

Committee Members:

Teacher Patti Appold

Teacher Craig Breikruetz

Teacher Brittni Carran

Pastor Bruce McKenney

Teacher Ben Rank

Teacher Hannah Uher

Teacher Fred Utteck

Subject: *Recommendation to establish a standing committee for the “Well-being of Called Workers” as part of the District’s Congregational Services.*

WHEREAS 1) the struggles of mental health issues of called workers came to the fore during the Covid pandemic; and

WHEREAS 2) there was a substantial increase in the number of called workers needing to use the Member Assistance Program* in the Western Wisconsin District post-Covid as well as an increase of resignations of called workers Synod wide; and

WHEREAS 3) Following the 2022 WW District Convention, its District Praesidium concluded, “Based on the input from our presenters and our delegates at convention this past June, we recognize that the emotional well-being of our called workers must be a priority in the near future;” and

WHEREAS 4) at its meeting on June 28, 2022 the Praesidium determined to establish an *ad hoc* committee to study this urgent matter and prepare a report for the Praesidium on how to address it; and

WHEREAS 5) reaction to presentations by the *ad hoc* committee throughout the district in the winter 2023 and information gleaned from a survey of pastors and teachers at the 2024 Teachers’ Conference confirmed that called workers are struggling with mental health issues; and

Whereas 6) after two years of study, the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Mental Health of Called Workers believes that a standing committee should be established to help congregations and called workers with the mental health crisis; therefore, be it

Resolved a) that in accordance with Article XV of the District’s Constitution, a standing committee on mental health issues be established as part of the Western Wisconsin District’s Congregational Services; and be it further

Resolved b) that this committee be called “The Committee for Called Worker Well-being;” and, be it finally

Resolved c) that this committee develop a proactive approach to meeting the needs of the WW District congregations and schools through an increased focus on the spiritual, emotional, and mental health of called workers and elected leaders.

Pastor Jeffrey Seelow, Chairman, WWD Mental Health Committee
Pastor Peter Snyder, Secretary