



2023 WELS Convention Supplemental Report

Transitions

After a decade as director of the Commission on Special Ministries (CSM), Rev. Jim Behringer retired at the end of June. Rev. Joel Gaertner, the new CSM director, had served as chair of the commission alongside Behringer and greatly expanded Jesus Cares Ministries during those years. The transition of leadership will reflect their shared commitment to inclusion of those with disabilities, to sharing the gospel despite any challenge or obstacle, and to encouraging every Christian to use their gifts to serve as well as be served. Gaertner is also committed to bringing the concept of compassion ministry to congregations.



Love and compassion

“Love God . . . Love your neighbor.” Special Ministries’ work depends on both. Love and compassion for people in their struggles and disabilities pulls congregations together and attracts people in the community to find the love of Christ where there is love. All the Special Ministries resources you’ll read about are meant to be used in compassion that flows from God’s grace. Every Christian



congregation motivated by love for sharing the gospel and love for others should serve members and prospects regardless of disabilities or barriers. As you read about each area of ministry, watch for mentions of the baseline for serving others with Special Ministry resources.

New Special Ministries Bible study – free!

This Bible class teaches members to appreciate the role of compassion in a Christian’s personal and congregational life. It provides gospel motivation for participants to go beyond their comfort zones and act in compassionate ways through the Spirit’s power. Where the Bible class succeeds in cultivating compassion, congregations will be better spiritual refuges for people with broken lives and welcome people looking for a church family where they can walk a new path after release from prison, or in recovery from addiction, or starting a new life after a public fall into sin. Downloadable from WELS Congregational Services!



“Communicate with everyone!”

Members of the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MDHH) say that the baseline of serving members and prospects is communication with everyone. No one should be shut out because



of hearing loss. To encourage use of the hearing loop for the hard of hearing, MDHH offers a \$500 grant. Churches that need a sign language interpreter can also find help with MDHH. A video of tips for serving the deaf and hard of hearing is available online at WELS Congregational Services. Find MDHH at wels.net/mdhh.

Christian Worship available in braille

The Mission for the Visually Impaired (MVI) helps churches serve anyone who has trouble with resources in print. Since many more members need large print than braille products, MVI urges churches to have large print copies of worship services available for when they are needed. MVI continues to expand the WELS Listen Library – Christian audiobooks, *Forward in Christ*, and *Meditations* are available for free to anyone who is blind or visually impaired (apply via the service application at listen.wels.net). This year MVI has made the hymns and liturgy in the new *Christian Worship* available in braille. Contact MVI at welsvisimp@wels.net.

Keeping children safe from abuse

Freedom for the Captives (FFTC) receives thanks from adults who experienced sexual abuse as children. The website, freedomforcaptives.com, has spiritual resources for survivors and guidance for church leaders for developing and implementing abuse prevention policies and for responding to incidents of abuse in keeping with Christ's teachings about children. Every church can use FFTC training materials for free. FFTC urges churches not only to develop policies but to understand mandatory reporting and train all who work with youth. Contact FFTC at freedom@wels.net.



Chaplains go places!

The Chaplain Certification Program (CCP) provides training for called workers and lay members to minister with the gospel in institutions, whether it's care facilities, jails, or with the police or fire department. This fall, CCP offers these courses: "Communicating Forgiveness," "Ministering to the Incarcerated and their Families," "Geriatric and Care Facility Ministry" (free!), "The Spiritual Side of PTSD," and "Grounded in Scripture." See wels.net/chaplain to learn more.

Incarceration and freedom

Scripture urges, "Remember those in prison," and many WELS members serve as penpals and test correctors, providing spiritual support to those behind bars. Prison Ministry urges congregations to maintain spiritual support to their members who are incarcerated. And when someone is released from jail, Mentor Training is available to help the returning citizen find a place at church and in the community. See wels.net/prison for information.

Preparing them to resist porn

Conquerors through Christ (CtC) has created resources for every age group. Parents have welcomed the parenting resources. One WELS mom turned to the CtC website when her eight-year-old saw some porn on the internet. "The materials for parents are amazing," she said. Whether it's for yourself or for others, check out the resources at conquerorsthroughchrist.net.



Spiritual support for military members

WELS Military Services Committee (MSC) supports military members spiritually – only if we have their contact information. You can help by putting us in touch with family or fellow WELS members through our referral system at wels.net/refer. We strongly encourage congregations to keep their connection to these men and women far from home. Check out resources for ministry to the military at wels.net/military.



Strengthening mental health and pastoral care

Special Ministries' WELS/ELS Christian Therapists Network is fostering a closer partnership between WLCFS Christian Family Solutions and pastors. A combination

of video presentations and pastoral conferences, the program is called *Effective Soul Care Partnership*. A panel of pastors and therapists discuss a topic where collaboration and cooperation between spiritual shepherds and professional Christian counselors can serve the needs of church members. See the WELS/ELS Christian Therapists Network website (christiantherapistnetwork.com) for updated information.



In the church, every child of God belongs

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry urges congregations to provide spiritual instruction and worship that meets the needs of people with developmental or intellectual disabilities. If you have a special needs child

or adult in your congregation, sign them up to receive cards and letters through WELS "He Cares / We Care" program at wels.net/refer. It is important to maintain contact with parents of children with special needs to encourage them and to see if there are ways that members can provide help. People with special needs often have gifts to serve and need to be included. Learn more at wels.net/iddm.

Trauma informed parenting

Parenting children who have experienced trauma is different from parenting those who haven't. Common parenting approaches often backfire. But there is hope! Special Ministries' Light for Parents, which offers resources to help families of children with extraordinary needs, conducts workshops to teach trauma informed parenting.



This course offers an informal, yet thorough approach to Trust-Based Relational Intervention®, an evidence-based intervention for children from hard places of abuse, neglect, and/or trauma, including children who were adopted. Learn more at lightforparents.com.

Giving encouragement and support to our called workers

Core members of the congregation often would do more for called workers and their families if they had information and awareness. WELS Care Committee for Called Workers (CCCW) has resources to equip a committee of trusted members to care for those who devote their energies to the work of the church. A congregational president or chairman of elders can learn about this program at wels.net/CCCW.

Health care and compassion

Parish Nursing provides an opportunity for WELS members who are nurses to use their skills and training among God's people and create opportunities for caring and conversation with people in the neighborhood. Learn more about parish nursing at wels.net/nurses.

