

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT

2019 District Conference

Minutes

The pastors, male teachers, and staff ministers of the Southeastern Wisconsin District gathered at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 11-12, 2019 for the 2019 Southeastern Wisconsin District Conference. Approximately 321 of the 557 active called workers of the district were in attendance. 171 were excused, and 64 were either unexcused or unregistered. Sixteen retired called workers, four uncertified called workers, ten lay delegates to the synod convention, and two other guests were also registered and in attendance.

Tuesday, June 11

The conference opened with a communion worship service. Professor Sam Degner of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was the preacher. Pastor Martin Wildauer served as the worship leader. The district officers assisted in the service as lectors and with the distribution of communion. Mr. Kevin Becker served as the organist for the service. The festival choir was directed by Staff Minister Levi Nagel.

District President David Kolander called the conference to order at 11:04 a.m. He presented his President's report (copy attached) to the conference. First Vice President Joel Leyrer took the chair during his report. President Kolander's report focused on the work we do as a church body to connect souls to the truth of God's Word in our changing culture. He especially mentioned efforts to deal with the shortage of teachers, including streamlining the ministry certification process, noted the new pastors and teachers who were assigned to our district at Assignment Days, and introduced the one new pastor who was present, reviewed several items receiving the attention of the District Praesidium and the Conference of Presidents, and noted several key events in the previous year.

After his report, President Kolander introduced WELS First Vice President James Huebner who brought greetings from WELS President Mark Schroeder and encouraged us to find joy in the miracles that the gospel creates in our ministries.

WELS Ministerial Education Administrator Paul Prange presented a report on the important work our four ministerial education schools do to prepare pastors, teachers and staff ministers for our congregations and schools in this challenging time when workers are few. He mentioned things we all could to encourage young people and second career students to prepare for ministry and especially noted the three emphases of the "Encouraging Christian Witnesses" offering that will be launched at the synod convention: recruitment, tuition assistance, and facilities. He also reported on continuing education efforts at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and efforts being made to prepare more teachers who are both ministry certified and trained for urban ministry.

District Secretary Billy Carter made several announcements regarding registration and instructions for lunch. District President Kolander led us in a meal prayer and we broke for lunch.

President Kolander began the afternoon session at 1:15 by introducing Pastor Jonathan Hein, WELS Congregational Services Administrator, who delivered the keynote presentation, based on the theme of the conference, "Connecting to a Changing Culture." His presentation focused on the three key words of that theme in reverse order. He introduced us to a definition of culture; used demographics to help us understand the ways that our culture is changing, and spoke about the reasons for and ways to connect to that changing culture in our outreach efforts.

After the essay, President Kolander declared a fifteen minute break.

Pastor Keith Free, WELS Administrator for Home Missions, presented a report about the work of Home Missions across the synod. He highlighted several trends that caused the significant reduction in the number of new mission starts this year. He also highlighted the work being done in this year's missions starts and mission enhancements, noted that we would be celebrating 100 years of campus ministry in 2020, reported on some of the cross cultural efforts benefitting from the work of the Pastoral Studies Institute, noted the opportunities available through Mission Journeys, and reported that a grant from the Church Extension Fund allowed the board to start three new missions last fall.

Mr. Steven Wolf, member of the District Board for Home Missions and the executive board of the WELS Board for Home Missions, made a presentation on the missions in our district. He noted the retirement of Mission Counselor Ed Schuppe, reported on the requests the district board had brought to the Home Missions board (one deferred, one funded for one year, and one denied), gave a brief report from each of the missions in the district, noted four more areas that the district board is currently studying, and described the support provided by various mission groups.

Tim Snyder, our district representative on the WELS Synodical Council, presented a report on the work of the Council. He noted the make-up of the Council and its key responsibilities, focusing especially on the synod's Ministry Financial Plan. He noted that we have needed to draw down the Financial Stabilization Fund and make use of reserve funds in recent years and that the current Ministry Plan attempts to reduce the use of those reserve funds. He also noted the current list of un-funded priorities.

Pastor Jon Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services, gave a presentation about the work of the commissions under the Congregational Services umbrella. He focused on joint efforts among the commissions: the Welcome Home initiative, which will help congregations reach out to inactive members, C19, which includes outreach resources for Christmas, and the National Conference on Lutheran Leadership in January. He also gave a snapshot of the work of four of the five commissions, Congregational Counseling, Worship, Discipleship, and Lutheran Schools. He also introduced Pastor James Behringer, WELS Special Ministries Director, who summarized the many ministries coordinated by that commission.

Pastor Robert Hein, chairman of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, showed a video about the humanitarian and relief efforts that are the focus of his committee's work and the way that work provides opportunities to share God's love in a culture than needs to hear it. He spoke about several specific efforts in the last year and encouraged us to make members aware of the kinds of help they can provide and the ways that they can help in their communities.

Pastor Kurt Lueneburg, administrator of the WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, reported that statistics show that congregational mission offerings have increased in recent years even as WELS membership is declining, but that this year's commitments have decreased. and encouraged congregations to work toward increasing their commitments in future years. He gave a brief update on the special offerings for outreach in Vietnam and the work of Congregational Services. He encouraged us to make use of our Christian Giving Counselors to help educate members about estate planning and noted that the tax exemption for RMD transfers to charities had been made permanent.

President Dan Johnson of Wisconsin Lutheran College highlighted the college's mission to provide Christian higher education to students getting ready to serve God in secular careers in our challenging culture. He asked us to encourage members to consider WLC and asked for our prayers as they face the impacts of our culture on their ministry.

After several announcements, the session closed with a devotion on the theme, "Languages have changed and will change, but the gospel remains the same," based on Nehemiah 8:1-12, led by Circuit Pastor Peter Martin. The devotion included prayers for teacher Donovan Zastrow, who was hospitalized this week for internal bleeding. Pastor Johnold Strey served as the organist.

Wednesday, June 11

We opened the session with a devotion on the theme, "Worship forms have changed and will change, but the gospel remains the same," based on Colossians 2:13-19; 3:15-17, led by Circuit Pastor Karl Schultz. The members of Branches Band accompanied the devotion.

Secretary Carter and President Kolander made several announcements about the day's work, including an update on teacher Donovan Zastrow's recovery from surgery to stop some internal bleeding.

Pastor Schlomer gave a presentation about the work of world missions. He noted that more than 400 national pastors are reaching at least 300,000 people in our mission fields, and that this number does not yet include the Hmong churches we're beginning to serve in Vietnam. He also gave brief snapshots of the work in each of our mission fields: Apache, which recently celebrated its 125th anniversary; One Africa team, including new work in Uganda and Kenya; East Asia; the new opportunity for Hmong outreach in Vietnam; Indonesia, now breaking ground for a seminary building; Pakistan; Albania and other places in Europe, with new opportunities for training Christian leaders; Ukraine, noting the 25th anniversary of work there; Latin America, with increasing contacts through Academia Christo. He also noted opportunities to serve in Mission Journeys and several ways for our members to learn more about World Missions.

President Kolander introduced the missionaries attending our conference, Dr. Glen Thompson and Pastor Guy Marquardt; as well as Prof. Kenneth Cherney, Jr., who very recently received the call to lead the outreach and training efforts in Vietnam.

Mr. Bill Ziche, president of Northwestern Publishing House, gave a presentation that focused especially on the recent changes in their ministry, including closing the retail store, outsourcing distribution and order fulfillment, and moving the offices to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. He also reviewed the publishing role that NPH still plays in our synod's ministry and directed attention to a folder that noted the projects and resources that NPH is currently producing.

Pastor John Braun, vice-president of editorial services at Northwestern Publishing House and editor of the Forward in Christ magazine, gave a report that summarized the goals for the magazine, as well as the very positive results of a recent survey of readers.

Pastor Michael Schultz, director of the WELS Hymnal Project, gave us an oral report on the work being done as the project gets closer to completion in 2021. He focused especially on the many other books that will be published in connection with the hymnal and plans for several online and technological resources. He noted that there would be more information available in a summer update being posted on the project's website and thanked the hymnal committee and other synodical leaders for all their work in preparing, supporting, and promoting the work on the new hymnal.

Martin Spriggs, WELS Chief Technology Officer, gave a presentation which focused on several key technology initiatives, including the called worker profile information available in the WELS Cloud, improvements to the compensation calculator, improvements to the new WELS mobile app, plans to make WELS content available on Amazon Echo and other platforms, and recent updates to the WELS privacy policy and resources available for congregations to develop their own privacy policies.

Secretary Carter presented a report on the finances of the district, including a few notes about the other ways district funds are used in addition to covering the cost of our conventions and conferences. He also directed our attention to several other items in the district materials, encouraged us to use the printed or online evaluation forms to provide feedback on this conference, and thanked the staff of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Kremer Publications, the conference secretaries, and everyone else who helped prepare for this conference.

Before giving us the opportunity to ask questions about any of the reports and presentations made at this conference as well as the reports in the Book of Reports and Memorials, he repeated Secretary Carter's encouragement to provide feedback on this conference, noting especially that the district praesidium would appreciate comments that would help them reassess the purpose and format of these district conferences. He also asked us to note the dates of next year's district convention, scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, June 9-10 at Wisconsin Lutheran College. He also reported that the praesidium had designated the opening service offering of \$1,400 toward the outreach effort in Vietnam.

During the discussion period, there were comments that encouraged us to find a way to continue the discussion about the important points about culture made in the keynote presentation and urged the praesidium to consider all alternatives when reassessing the purpose and format of the district conferences. There was also a question about the availability of the reports and presentations that had been made at the conference, which gave Secretary Carter the opportunity to report that electronic versions of those presentations and videos would be made available on the district website.

President Kolander also directed our attention to the memorials in the Book of Reports and Memorials and invited WELS Lutheran Schools Administrator James Rademan to provide information about the memorial that urges the convention to make the voluntary supplemental contributions toward the work of Lutheran Schools mandatory for all schools. There were several comments and questions for Administrator Rademan.

At the end of the discussion period, Vice President Leyrer approached a microphone to thank Secretary Carter for his work in organizing the conference and to thank President Kolander for his tireless efforts on behalf of the district. He also asked us to keep President Kolander in our prayers as he continues his work. The conference responded with a standing round of applause for President Kolander.

After President Kolander thanked us for our prayers and asked the Lord to give us all safe travels home and to continue to bless our ministries, the conference closed with a devotion on the theme, "Education methods have changed and will change, but the gospel remains the same," based on Deuteronomy 11:17-21, led by Assistant Circuit Pastor Jason Hacker. Pastor Martin Wildauer served as the organist for this devotion.

Respectfully submitted
William R. Carter, secretary