



# Pacific Northwest **DISTRICT**

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

## **District President's Report PNW District Pastors'-Teachers' Conference October 2017, Leavenworth, WA**

### **A Special People Celebrate a Special Month from a Special God**

Reformation Month, October 2017, is a special one! As we have all recently heard and read countless times, this month marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation when Martin Luther nailed the 95 statements on a door hoping to spark a debate about things spiritual. And spark a debate he did!

Many things could be mentioned concerning the multiple talents and abilities embodied in God's servant, Martin Luther. Many stories could be shared about the history surrounding the Reformation. In fact, over the past months, I've heard and read many facts and statements that, despite my many years in school, I never heard (or remembered) about the Lutheran Reformation. But maybe the most important fact in Martin Luther's life is the example of God's grace in action.

The Bible states, ***"Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all nations, as it is today"*** (Dt. 10:15). Moses was inspired to tell the Israelites that their place as God's chosen people and their place in God's saved family is nothing short of God's pure grace. The same is true of Martin Luther.

Martin Luther had been brought up to believe that the righteousness of God was something to be earned with his own good works. Luther had been extremely concerned with his holiness before God. He had never been sure that God would be gracious to him and forgive his sins. As a young, zealous scholar he had wrestled time and again with the nagging question of his personal righteousness. In a monastery he hoped to find peace of mind.

Luther tried hard to be a good monk. He was exemplary in carrying out the strict rules and regulations governing his life in the monastery. So rigorous was his monastic discipline that his life almost slipped away from him. But starving and beating his body did not bring peace to his soul. Sadly enough, this era of Luther's life could well be compared to the oriental mystic who lies on a bed of nails or walks on burning coals in an effort to deepen and broaden his faith or find some spiritual peace.

Praise God for that moment in Luther's life when the full light of the gospel began to shine upon Luther as the Holy Spirit touched his heart through such promises of Scripture as those found in Romans and Habakkuk: ***"The just shall live by faith."***

The words of Moses from the tenth chapter of Deuteronomy remind us of more than God's grace in Luther's life. They remind us that God's grace has changed our lives too. The Savior-God has surely ***"set his affection on us... loved us... chose us."*** What Luther wrote, we believe. ***"I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in the Lord Jesus Christ or come to him"*** (Expl., Third Article, AC). Our place as God's chosen people and our place in God's saved family is nothing short of God's pure grace.

The grace of God that reached into Luther's life changed the history of the Christian church. This same grace of God has reached out to us also and changed our destiny. Instead of getting what we deserve for our many sins, we now are forgiven children of God for Jesus' sake. Thanks be to our special God that our destiny is now a heavenly one. Ponder this. Share it. And, as a special people, let's live our thankfulness every day beyond this special month!

### **WELS PNW District Called Worker Updates** *(since DP Report to June Delegate Conference)*

#### **Teachers INTO the PNW:**

Principal Training Candidate Jacob Biebert (May 2017) assigned to St. Matthew, Spokane, WA  
Candidate Phillip Bunkowske (May 2017) assigned to Evergreen LHS  
Candidate Martin Santos (May 2017) 1 Yr. – assigned to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, WA  
Candidate Micah Wendt (May 2017) assigned to Immanuel, Salem, OR  
Joel and Kelli Plocher (July 2017) to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, WA (from Neenah, WI)  
MLC Emergency Teacher Sammi Koepsell (Aug. 2017) 1 Yr. – assigned to Christ the King, Bremerton, WA  
Jill Sarro to Christ the King, Bremerton, WA (Aug. 2017) 1 Yr.  
Diane Bloom to Christ the King, Bremerton, WA (Aug. 2017) 1 Yr.  
Beth Humann to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, WA (Fall 2017, fill-in for maternity leave) 1 Yr.  
Ryan Schmeling from Grace, Portland, OR to ELHS, Tacoma, WA

#### **Teachers OUT of the PNW:**

Jason Schleef (resignation from Immanuel, Salem, OR, June 2017)  
Nicholas Trebesch to Luther Prep School (June 2017)  
Nicole Trebesch (resignation from Light of Life EC, Covington, WA, June 2017)  
Tim Fischer to Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, WI (June 2017)  
Patrick Cortright to Sienna Lutheran Academy, Missouri City, TX (June 2017)

#### **Teachers Retired:**

Beth Humann from Evergreen LHS, Tacoma, WA (June 30, 2017)

#### **Pastors INTO the PNW:**

Candidate Geoffrey Rue (May 2017) assigned to St. Paul, Tacoma, WA

#### **Pastors OUT of the PNW:**

Pastor Matthew Kimmel to St. Luke, New Lisbon, WI (10-15-17)  
Pastor Steven Wall to St. John/St. Peter, Cleveland, WI (10-16-17)

#### **Pastors Retired:**

Pastor James Humann RETIRED from Evergreen LHS, Tacoma, WA (6-30-17)  
Pastor Thomas Gumm RETIRED from Grace, Seattle and Salem, Edmonds, WA (8-20-17)

#### **Recent Call Activity in the PNW:**

*(those "holding Calls" are in italics)*

Pastor Stephen Kuehl RETURNED the Call to Grace in Yakima, WA (6-24-17)  
Pastor Andrew Schwartz RETURNED the Call to Mt. Olive in Shakopee, MN (7-1-17)

Pastor Michael Schneider RETURNED the Call to Grace in Yakima, WA (7-21-17)  
Pastor Jason Strong RETURNED the Call to Our Savior in Harrisonville, MO (8-4-17)  
Pastor Rob Guenther RETURNED the Call to Trinity in Belle Plaine, MN (8-19-17)  
Pastor Joel Hoff RETURNED the Call to Cross of Life in Mississauga, Ontario, CAN (8-27-17)  
Pastor Paul Biedenbender RETURNED the Call to Grace in Yakima, WA (9-9-17)  
Pastor Thad Bitter RETURNED the Call to Ascension in Escondido, CA (9-17-17)  
Pastor Robbin Robbert RETURNED the Call to Beautiful Savior in Spooner, WI (9-17-17)  
Pastor Brian Hackmann RETURNED the Call to Resurrection in Maumee, OH (9-19-17)  
*Pastor Chris Ewings HOLDING the Call to Divine Savior in Doral, FL (9-22-17)*  
*Pastor Tim Flunker HOLDING the Call to Grace in Yakima, WA (10-1-17)*  
*Pastor Kevin Schnake HOLDING the Call to St. Paul in Grant Park, IL (10-3-17)*  
Pastor Matt Zimpelmann RETURNED the Call to Good Shepherd in Omaha, NE (10-8-17)  
*Pastor Dan Solofra HOLDING the Call to Truth in Love Ministry, Nampa, ID (10-10-17)*  
Pastor Dan Kramer RETURNED the Call to Nebraska LHS in Waco, NE (10-15-17)

### **PNW current vacancies: (7)**

For pastor-trained – 6 (Holy Trinity, Des Moines, WA; Faith, Anchorage, AK; Grace, Yakima, WA;  
Truth in Love Ministry, Nampa, ID; St. Matthew, Spokane, WA; Christ, Juneau, AK)  
For teacher-trained – 1 (Grace, Portland, OR)

### **WELS current vacancies:**

The “Calling Window” for teachers is soon to open (Nov. 1). Synod vacancies continue to be a concern for the COP for both teachers and pastors. With the need for teachers, our inactive teacher pool has been tapped into heavily. This summer we reported that close to 100 “inactive” teachers became “active” and were Called into service during last year’s Calling window (11-1-16 to 6-3-17)! As for pastors... at last week’s meetings, we tallied the WELS vacancies at 101 for parishes and 118 total pastor needs.

The COP continues to monitor closely the pastoral vacancy rate and how the calling process can best serve the needs of congregations and workers in a time of a shortage of pastors. No significant changes have been put into place other than the allowance of pastors to be on two Call lists if congregations are Calling on the same day.

We also discussed the recruitment of future Called workers in our congregations and schools. Pastors and teachers want to remember that they have a great impact in encouraging young men and women to serve. Our attitudes and faithful service also serve as a key recruitment tool as we model the joy of serving Jesus full-time. Please join me in thanking God for providing current workers and praying that the Lord of the harvest would send more workers in to his harvest field. The harvest field is plentiful, but the workers are few!

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### **COP Summaries**

We thank God that **Congregation Mission Offerings** are up 1.6% over last year (\$231,000). As congregations begin planning for next year, MCG Chairman, Pastor Matt Zimpelmann and I sent all WELS pastors instructions and links (with a video link too) to help you encourage and guide congregations in this process.

Submission of stats should be easier this year as “institutional ministry stats” are being dropped and the “age categories” aren’t needed this year (not needed again until 2020). Our MCG Office reports that close to 100

congregations have already submitted their CMOs (over \$1.6M) to-date. We are very thankful for these planned gifts and we look forward to incoming submissions as we near year's end. Deadline for receipt of **2017 CMO gifts** is January 8, 2018. Deadline to get **2018 CMO subscriptions and 2017 stats** is February 2, 2018.

Because of our focus on Reformation 500 this month, we are suggesting a **2017 WELS Mission and Ministry Sunday** this November. You will find a variety of materials posted at [wels.net](http://wels.net) for this fall event. (Future 2018 WELS Mission and Ministry Sunday will feature materials from Congregational Services related to the release of a final outreach movie. We suggest congregations consider a 2018 October date).

Additionally, MCG has published a **new stewardship program**, *Joyful Generosity*, for congregations to use in 2017 and 2018. The program includes six weeks of worship and Bible study materials as well as 21 personal devotions. You can find the program online at [wels.net/stewardship](http://wels.net/stewardship).

Last year the COP determined that **pastors teaching at Lutheran high schools** and prep schools fall under the same calling guidelines that restrict the calling of teachers (to avoid staffing challenges in schools; window is Nov. 1 through the first week of June, with two calls possible during that time). The COP recently clarified this policy by determining that pastors serving in primarily administrative roles (presidents/principals, deans, etc.) at the schools *can still be called at any time*.

Just a reminder that the COP continues to work with the Commission on Lutheran Schools to better prepare male teachers for the role and work of the **school principal**. The goal is to Call teachers who are currently serving so that we no longer need to assign young men as "principal apprentices" right out of MLC. We hope to have a full complement of trained individuals in the next few years. Meanwhile, CLS will continue to work with district presidents and schools to fill principal vacancies with limited duration calls and retired principals, as best as possible, (similar efforts for EC Directors).

The COP **extended divine calls** to Rev. Jerry Ewings to serve as a Christian giving counselor and to Rev. Mark Gabb to serve as the director of the Commission on Evangelism. Rev. Doug Tomhave was appointed to serve as the chairman of the Commission on Evangelism.

Earlier this year the COP established a standing committee to **work with WELS parasynodical organizations**. The purpose of the committee is to foster good communication and cooperation between the synod and WELS parasynodical organizations. The committee (Chairman DP Don Patterson, DP Chuck Westra, and DP Jon Buchholz) reported that it had begun its work and will continue to develop its goals and policies.

The COP discussed the **workload of district presidents** who serve in the large districts (i.e. 3 in Wisconsin). President Schroeder will investigate some options to provide for this needed assistance.

There was discussion on how the **certification process for teachers** can be improved and, if possible, streamlined. Those teachers in our district who have let their WELS certification lapse, are encouraged to speak with either me or 2<sup>nd</sup> VP Pastor Jer Schulz if there is a desired to be re-certified. Currently a handful of teachers have requested and are seeking re-certification. The COP also asked Martin Luther College to review certification requirements for all teachers so we can discuss this at our January meeting.

We're asking the Synodical Council to establish an **ad hoc committee to study** future options for the **WELS Pension Plan**. No change in the plan is anticipated in the near future, but the COP agreed that such a study would be beneficial for future decisions (defined benefits vs. defined contributions).

The COP asked for the appointment of a special committee to discuss possible **alternative models for congregational constitutions and bylaws**. *“Every congregation and organization (e.g. area Lutheran high school) in the district has proposed and adopted a constitution and bylaws as governing documents. Your constitution and bylaws direct many aspects of your governance model and organizational structure. It is extremely important that your organization operate according to its constitution and bylaws! It might be easy to forget about those documents or to view them as an unnecessary impediment or impractical nuisance, but operating according to your governing documents is a legal and fiduciary requirement. Failure to operate according to your governing documents could prove extremely costly, could result in severe legal penalties, could jeopardize the property and assets of the organization, and could compromise the IRS 501(c)3 status of the organization. If your organization is out of compliance with its own constitution and bylaws, please take reasonable steps to getting back into compliance as quickly as possible. Remember that any changes to your constitution and bylaws must be approved by the district constitution committee before they are adopted and implemented by the congregation. Regardless of pending changes, please make sure that your district constitution committee is in possession of a current copy of your constitution and bylaws for its files.”*

A request was approved from Martin Luther College (MLC) for permission to conduct an appeal for MLC’s Congregational Partner Grant Program (CPGP). The CPGP gives congregations the opportunity to provide **direct financial support for students at MLC** preparing for the public ministry of WELS.

**Continuing Education for Pastors** - Professor Richard Gurgel has informed us of some changes coming to our current Summer Quarter offerings. In the summer of 2018, the seminary will begin offering campus summer quarter **only every even numbered year**. In the odd numbered years, beginning in 2019, the seminary hopes to offer a satellite Summer Quarter in each of the 11 districts beyond the Southeastern Wisconsin District. At each of these satellites, the seminary would hope to have at least 2 course options from which pastors could choose. There is also a plan to partner with MLC to offer at least 2 courses from which teachers could choose. Your district officers are working with Professor Gurgel and giving thought to opportunities we might have to make use of course offerings in the PNW. This change will be discussed at our PNW Convention this summer.

**Compensation** – as your church/school leaders plan for budgets and Calls, a reminder that our Synod in Convention approved a **helpful calculator**: <https://welscompcalc.azurewebsites.net/> This user-friendly tool will help Calling bodies most accurately arrive at what we often refer to as “Synod Code.”

**In the PNW** – as has been shared, we continue to keep in our prayers Pastor Joel Nitz and **Messiah LC in Lacey, WA**. On Oct. 15 during worship, their church caught on fire. What appears to be heating units (unofficially) started a roof fire that spread quickly and it appears the building may be a total loss (unofficially). We thank our God that no one was hurt. We pray that among the blessings that may result – community attention may be drawn to Messiah and the gospel, Messiah members may be drawn closer to each other in the rebuilding effort, Messiah might be blessed with a new facility as a tool for gospel ministry.

May God also bless **two new upstart missions**, The Vine in Coeur d’Alene, ID and Cross of Christ in Meridian, ID. Both of these “multi-site” missions have started worship this fall and are touching new souls with the saving gospel.

After the retirement of Pastor Tom Gumm, the members of **Salem in Edmonds, WA and Grace in Seattle** are worshipping as one group on Saturday nights at 6pm at Grace in Seattle. This will continue as the District’s Presidium and Mission Board are meeting with the core to set a plan and apply for some Synod funding to “restart this mission” with full-time funded manpower by next spring. Circuit Pastor Fred Schleg serves as their vacancy pastor and can answer questions or follow up on those interested in the ministry there.

**Coming Up...**

*(please share changes, omissions, corrections)*

Oct. 18-20	P/T Conference, Cascades Conf., Leavenworth, WA
Oct. 29-31	ACPaT, Alaskan Conf., Shepherd of the Hills
Jan. 14-18, 2018	COP Winter Meetings
Jan. 29-31, 2018	Missionaries' Conf., Hood River, OR
Feb. 15-16, 2018	Cascades Teachers' Conf., Lakewood, WA
Apr. 4-6, 2018	COP Spring Meetings
May 10-12, 2018	MLC Assignment Meetings and Graduation Service / Call Service
May 22, 2018	WLS Vicar Call Service
May 23-24, 2018	WLS Assignment Meetings and Call Service
May 25, 2018	WLS Graduation Service
June 9, 2018	Evergreen Luth. HS Graduation Service
June 12-13, 2018	District Convention, ELHS
Oct. 2-5, 2018	COP Fall Meetings

*Thanks to all for your work and our partnership in the gospel!*

*Pastor John Steinbrenner,*

*PNW District President*