



Pacific Northwest DISTRICT

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

District President's Report, Winter 2015

PNW Missionaries' Conference

Hood River, OR

January 26-28, 2015

Tireless Service

Dear Brothers in ministry,

The Apostle Paul worked tirelessly for the gospel. He traveled, he preached, he taught – he witnessed to others again and again. There most certainly must have been those days when he wondered about other lines of work. “Imagine more normal hours. How about a line of work where I wouldn’t get beaten, imprisoned, yelled at or run out of town? I wonder what life would be like back in my hometown right now?!” Paul may have wondered those things now and again.

At times we wonder those things. And just maybe those thoughts creep into our hearts and minds more during this month of the year than any other. The Christmas/NY Break ends. Maybe family visits us... or we travel to see them. The few slower days are fun. The emotions of the season are high. Then it’s “good-bye.” Time to gear-up again. Time to get that Bible study series planned and started. Lent rotation needs scheduling. Another Bible information class is waiting for us to initiate. Toss in some dreary, cold weather and darker, shorter days. “I feel depressed,” whispers our member. “Be nice to be closer to family,” whispers our wife. We need strength to press on during this often difficult time of year for ministry.

What gave Paul the power to press on? The ability to do mission work with joy even during dark days? An insight from 1 Cor.: *“For I am the least of the apostles called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (15:9-10).*

Regular time in God’s Word renews God’s workers... regular repentance refreshes us. Paul genuinely confessed who he was by nature and honestly admitted what he deserved forever. *“But,”* Paul sighs with joy and peace, *“by the grace of God I am what I am...”*

God’s undeserved love has that effect on us too. Were it not for comforting truths like “forgiveness, righteous by faith, called to serve, God’s children and heirs” we’d be thoroughly depressed. But, the grace of God reminds us who we are – despite what we deserve. And, the grace of God recalls what a privilege it is to serve our Savior. It’s an honor to hold a Divine Call to serve God’s redeemed people.

Then when January looms, nights get late, projects get lengthy, we long for family – we remember to continue a healthy devotional routine in God’s Word. Remembering what we deserve compared to what we’ve been given in Jesus Christ... God’s grace refreshes our hearts toward thankful, tireless service. As winter rolls on, may God constantly renew our hearts by his grace in Word and Sacraments. Brothers, with our focus on his love, God will strengthen and carry us. He will bless all of our gospel ministries throughout the Pacific Northwest!

Divine Calls, Vacancies, Retirements, Appointments, Etc.

*(please share omissions / corrections)
(picking up from Oct. DP report)*

King of Kings, Kennewick, WA had been vacant since early October 2014. On Nov. 4, Pastor Noah Bater (Prince of Peace, Salt Lake City, UT) declined their Call. On Nov. 9, KoK Called **Pastor Timothy Wilkens** (Trinity, Kaukauna, WI) to be their next shepherd. Pastor T. Wilkens **accepted** that Call (Dec. 7). He will be installed on Sunday, March 8, 2015, in a 4PM service. As such, Pastor Jim Turriff’s vacancy Call to KoK which initially ran to the end of 2014, was extended through the end of this February. We rejoice with King of Kings – thankful to the Lord for bringing them a new leader. Many thanks to Pastors Turriff and Vogel for shouldering the load and to other Central WA Called workers for their assistance to KoK.

Grace, Yakima, WA is undergoing changes too. Back on Oct. 19, **Pastor Jim Turriff** received a Call to **Gloria Dei in Memphis, TN**. He **accepted** that Call on Nov. 25, 2014. As such, his wife, **Janine**, is **resigning** from her Call as a **teacher** at Grace (Gr. 1-4) effective Feb. 28, 2015. On Dec. 14, 2014, Grace’s leaders extended a **“Limited Duration Call” to Marilee Nolte** (Longmont, CO). She **accepted** that Call on Christmas Day (12/25/14) to fill this teaching vacancy to the end of this current school year. Grace is currently studying their options for church and school ministries as they plan into the future. Pastor and Janine Turriff will celebrate their final Sunday at Grace on March 1, 2015. We are grateful to Jim and Janine for their service to Grace and our District over the past several years.

Christ the King, Bremerton, WA has been blessed with a new worker. As has been reported, **teacher Mr. Bruce Babler** will be **stepping down** after this school year. CtK began “fishing” as soon as the season opened last November. Mr. Matthew Bauer (St. Mark’s, Citrus Hts, CA) was Called to be Principal and Gr. 5-8 teacher. He returned that Call on Nov. 29. CtK Called again on Dec. 7, 2014. On Jan. 4, 2015, hearts rejoiced when **Mr. Chris Hintz** (Emmaus, Phoenix, AZ) **accepted** their Call. The exchange between Bruce and Chris will take place this summer, after this school year concludes – giving us time to offer thanks to Bruce for his many years of service in our midst.

Grace, Kenai, AK has been blessed with the ability to evaluate their overall ministry three times in the past 6 months. Pastor Rob Guenther (previously reported) returned a Call to Nevada (Aug.-Sept.). On Nov. 9, 2014, **Miss Angela Schwartz** (lower grade teacher) received a Call to Garden Homes (K-5) Milwaukee, WI. On Nov. 30, she **returned** that Call. On Jan. 6, 2015, Principal **Ryan Holper** received a Call to Bethany, Port Orchard, WA (ELS) to teach 7-8th grades. On January 29th, Ryan **returned** that Call and will continue serving our Lord at Grace in Kenai.

Pastor Brian Hackmann (Peace, Eagle River, AK) – received the Call to be pastor at Spirit of Life, Caledonia, MI (Oct. 23). He **returned** that Call on Nov. 22, 2014.

Pastor Nate Seiltz (ELHS, Principal-Dean) – received the Call to **Multi-Language Publications** (Nov. 14.) He **accepted** that Call on Jan. 22, 2015. (CMM – serves as an arm of Bd. World Missions – WELS) We will have until summer to thank Nate for his faithful service to ELHS and our PNW Distr. family.

Teacher Philip Kurbis (Faith, Tacoma, WA) – received a Call (Jan. 25) to teach 7th grade (w/science, religion, coaching) at Divine Savior Lutheran Academy in Doral, FL. Please keep Philip, his wife Shanna, and Faith Lutheran in your prayers during this time of deliberation.

PNW District News and Notes

In mid-August, I met with the leaders at **Divine Savior in Pullman, WA**, to discuss their future. After almost 20 years of functioning as a “preaching station” and being served by area/retired pastors, and after summer assessments from our DMB, we discussed the reality of “closing the church.” Concerns centered on finding a home to serve the souls of the remaining communicant members (5 adults and two teenagers); losing an “outpost for the gospel” in the Pullman/Moscow area; being faithful with Jesus’ assets in the small piece of land and building that remain. This past Dec. 14-15, I met again with their Chairman, Barrie Steele. I also had a breakfast meeting with retired Pastor Russell Schmidt and his wife Heidi. I shared a checklist for “closing a church” so things could be done in an orderly fashion. On Dec. 28, 2014, Divine Savior worshiped and communed for the final time as a congregation. Former members are finding spiritual homes. God has blessed them with a timely sale of their property. Once papers are signed they will be able to designate funds. Barrie Steele will fill out a final stat sheet for Synod. Pastor K. Schultz has somewhat of an itemized list of articles DS is willing to offer to District churches/missions (hymnals, Bible, pulpit, altar, etc.). Contact Barrie Steele (steelebsbr@gmail.com; 208-669-0412) if your church has needs in these areas. We thank God for the 38 years of gospel ministry that was carried out by the shepherds and saints of Divine Savior.

Evergreen LHS has scheduled a Call Mtg. for Feb. 3. Lord willing, at that meeting they will extend Divine Calls for Principal and Athletic Director (advanced Spanish and SoSt/Hist.). Please keep the Evergreen Board and our high school family in your prayers during this time of change.

Pastor Jim Oldfield (Faith, Anchorage, AK) had extensive back surgery back in Sept. (*The Mayo Clinic* in Phoenix). After weeks of rehab and a short medical ‘leave of absence’ (to Nov. 2), Jim has slowly re-engaged into ministry. Thanks to his leaders and area pastors for their assistance. Recovery, however, has not progressed as hoped or planned. Continuing lower back pain (neck, knee) has doctors issuing further orders for more MRI’s and CAT scans. Soon Jim will know if there are more procedures for him to undergo. Please continue to pray for Jim that he might have the strength to endure, that healing speeds up and pain slows down. We wait on the Lord.

Pastor Robb Robbert (King of Kings, Wasilla, AK) has expressed interest in being our District’s WELS Historical Institute Rep. This is an effort by Synod to capture documents, records, history and events on all local levels before they get lost or fade into oblivion. Since no one else has stepped forward to challenge Robb, I’ll be speaking with him soon to perhaps get his historian’s jacket tailored.

At the time of this writing, **Pastor Jason and Becky Strong** (Light of the World, Fairbanks, AK) are in Arizona working through the final stages of adopting a newborn daughter. We rejoice in this blessing for the Strong’s and pray all goes well during these final days of awaiting the official waiving of “parental rights.” (*While at conference, it was announced that the adoption became official and the Strong’s were blessed with a new baby daughter; it was also then suddenly announced that Pastor Chris Ewings (Anchorage, AK) and his wife, Cara, just had a new baby daughter!*)

rev. 2-2-15

A **final reminder** that staffing requests, especially for teachers, need to be brought to my attention sooner than later. Call Days come quickly and the Calling window for teachers closes soon thereafter. On that note, if your congregation (or one in your Circuit) is experiencing challenges on a terminal level or even terminating a Called worker for financial reasons – please speak with your Circuit Pastor or a member of our Presidium right away. It is both brotherly and kingdom-minded to put pride aside and get assistance. There are guidelines, as well as legal and constitutional issues that need to be considered. Maybe our Mission Bd. can partner or assist or offer a plan. Most of all, there are souls to be cared for and assets belonging to Jesus that need to be used for gospel ministries. While retirement plans can be personal, they usually affect a congregation or classroom. There is much more to consider. While confidentiality can be honored, early planning for the future of a ministry is crucial. Thanks for putting the interests of God’s kingdom above our own!

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COP Meeting and Synod Summaries...

1. **CMO** – For calendar year 2014, congregations provided offerings to the Synod of \$21,272,502. The offerings represent:
 - \$83,000 more than projected;
 - An increase of \$277,000 or 1.3% over 2013 gifts;
 - An increase of \$568,000 or 2.7% over initial subscriptions for 2014;
 - 7 districts exceeded their subscription total;
 - Per communicant giving increased 2.2% to \$71.65;
 - The Pacific Northwest District offered 100.7% of subscriptions; \$89.50 per communicantWe are grateful to God for the outpouring of blessings through His people. *Praise God from whom all blessing flow!* May He continue to bless us with gifts to strengthen and increase the ministry of the gospel through members of the WELS to many others!

2. **CMO & Congregational Statistics** – Be sure to submit your CMO for 2015 and your 2014 congregational statistics online via [Connect](#) under “Things You May Need” on the right hand column of the homepage. The deadline is Friday, February 6. If you haven’t done so already, please consider doing it today and you’ll have one less item on your list!

3. **AD Hoc Committee II** – The committee will present its recommendations in the Book of Reports and Memorials to the 2015 WELS Convention. The current report is vastly different than the previous one as it focuses on fewer areas needing improvement or review.
 - A review of the compensation guidelines that we use.
 - A recommendation to have delegates to synod conventions serve for two consecutive conventions.
 - A recommendation that nominations for district/synod offices be handled by nom. cmt. prior to conventions.
 - A suggestion MLC offer more merit-based scholarships as in academics, also student achiev.’s (arts, athletics).
 - An encouragement for BHM to explore new ways of reaching people in large urban areas (true diversity).
 - An encouragement for BWM to continue exploring strategic expansion in our world mission fields.
 - An encouragement for BHM and CEF to explore protecting our investments if missions decide to leave WELS.

4. **CLC Discussions** – Representatives from WELS, ELS, CLC will meet January 30 to discuss issues that have separated the Church of the Lutheran Confession from WELS & ELS. Professor Tom

Nass has prepared a document available for review, which gives an historical perspective on the issues. We ask God's blessings on these discussions and those involved.

5. **LCMS – WELS – ELS Discussions** – The 3rd such meeting took place in December 2014. This meeting focused on the doctrine of fellowship. The discussions have helped to understand LCMS doctrine and practice and how it differs from our WELS understanding of this scriptural doctrine. While the discussions didn't lead us much closer regarding the practice of fellowship, the talks have helped dispel some of the caricatures of each of the church bodies. Next discussion will focus on man-woman issues.
6. **Military Chaplaincy Study Committee** – Military Services Committee has requested a study of whether the US Military Chaplaincy is an option for WELS to consider. Members of the study committee appointed by the COP: James Danell (Chairman), Paul Horn (MSC), John Brenner (WLS), Hans Cauuwe (Parish Pastor), Erhard Opsahl (Retired LPS), Morris Hayes (Retired Military), Don Tollefson (COP Rep).
7. **Loving Reminder about Increasing Blog Criticism** – There are a number of blogs in our circles – some anonymous – that are critical of a variety of things in the WELS. In the spirit of the Gospel, we encourage *brothers* to talk to *brothers* and speak directly with those involved rather than resort to uncharitable (unsigned) criticism. Thank you!
8. **Call Procedure Question** – In answer to a question raised about inconsistent Calling procedures among our 12 Districts, it was determined that there is a general *consistency* in the way the Calling process is administered among the DP's. We recognize there is a human element in the Calling process. There is also consensus to minimize the human element as much as possible to leave guidance and direction in the Lord's hands.
9. **Vacancies** – There are currently 62 vacant parishes (74 total pastoral vacancies). At present there will be 30 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduates available for assignment and 29 vicars. It is too early to get a firm estimate on either the number of teaching vacancies or Martin Luther College graduates available for assignment in May, 2015.
10. **Marriage – Divorce – Remarriage** – The document authorized by the Conference of Presidents in 1989 is in the process of being reviewed and updated. It is scheduled to be presented to the WELS Convention this summer with additional guidance from the Scriptures on several of the contemporary challenges to marriage and family life. Our families need continual guidance from God's Word to be strengthened and nurtured to carry out God's will for His glory and their blessing.
11. **Constitutions** – As a general, loving reminder – congregations drafting a constitution for the first time, or those considering an update or revision of their current constitution or bylaws are urged to pass your revisions by our District's Constitution Committee. They also keep a copy of your updates on file. Thank you.

12. **Scheduling the Fall Meeting of the COP** – Beginning in 2016, the Fall COP Meeting will be held the third full week of September in conjunction with the WLS Symposium rather than second full week in October. This is being done to reduce conflicts with our P/T Conferences and to allow for attendance at the Symposium.
13. **Reformation Gathering** – A proposed synod-wide meeting of pastors, teachers and staff ministers to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 was brought to the COP. The proposed assembly would be an opportunity for state-side called workers to gather together for worship, study, communion, fellowship as an expression and exercise of unity in the pillars of the Lutheran Reformation that we have been richly blessed by for 5 centuries. It would be a unique gathering in the history of the WELS and a life-long memory for called workers! Would congregations support funding travel and expenses for a Reformation gathering in Milwaukee in place of their Fall Conferences in 2017? The opportunity might present itself – with each District doing its best to participate.
14. **Urban Ministry Candidates** – Urban schools, especially in Milwaukee, are looking for qualified candidates to teach in their schools. Because at this time we are not training a sufficient number of such candidates at MLC with urban school experience, MLC has provided a list of possible urban candidates to the COP. The respective DP's can inform the urban schools in need of graduates of the number of candidates that will be available in the positions for which they might be calling. If the school will have need of more candidates than MLC can provide, then a letter of intent could be sent to WELS students who are not MLC trained. MLC and DP's are communicating and coordinating these efforts (reviewed annually).
15. **Health Insurance, VEBA** (encouragement cf. DP Report Oct. 2014)
16. **Role of Circuit Pastors** – We thank God for the work of our Circuit Pastors. Support them. Pray for them. Encourage them by working together with them and communicating with them!!

Coming Up...

(please share changes, omissions, corrections)

February 12-13	ACPaT – Light of the World (Fairbanks, AK)
March 19-20	Spring Teachers' Conference (Bethany, Port Orchard, WA)
April 8-10	COP Meeting
April 17-19	PNW Men's Retreat (Port Townsend, WA) Prof. J. Brug: "Fellowship"
April 17-19	LWMS (W.O.W) Women's Retreat (Hood River, OR)
April 25	LWMS Spring Rally (Spokane, WA)
May 14-15	MLC Assignment Mtgs.
May 16	MLC Commencement & Call Services
May 19	WLS Vicar Assignment Mtgs. & Call Service
May 20	WLS Pastor Assignment Mtgs.
May 21	WLS Call Service
May 22	WLS Graduation Service
June 6	ELHS graduation (2pm)
June 9-10	Pastoral Institute (Holy Trinity, Des Moines, WA)
June 11-12	District Delegate Conference (ELHS, Tacoma, WA)

July 27-30
October 12-15

Synod Convention (MLS Saginaw, MI)
COP Meeting

*Pastor John Steinbrenner,
PNW District President*