



Arizona-California District—WELS Report of the District President

November 2013

"Therefore come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. —2 Cor. 6:17-7:1

The practice of fellowship in different settings raises some interesting questions. Many of the situations and applications that have for generations challenged Lutherans who wish to remain faithful to the truth are still with us. These include lodge membership, participation in Boy Scouts of America (BSA), non-member musicians or soloists performing at weddings and funerals, and more. Add to these several new applications that have arisen in recent years, and we are met with a good reminder why it's so important that we have a thorough understanding of the principles undergirding any application of fellowship.

Sometimes the practice of fellowship gets reduced to "There's no worship and no prayer, so there's no fellowship." In some cases this is correct, but in other cases it's simply not true.

Let's remember that this blessed fellowship is, first and foremost, something positive. We are blessed to be united with brothers and sisters in one common faith, a unified understanding of Christian doctrine, and a remarkable consistency in practice within a joyful spectrum of Christian freedom. It is precisely because we love and cherish this unity that we don't want it to be compromised by false teaching, false practice, laxity, or tolerance of the same.

With that in mind, we recall why we "Watch out for" and "keep away from" those with different teaching: (1) We love our Lord Jesus and his precious, pure word, and we cannot tolerate errors that always originate with Satan's deceptions. (2) We are careful and conscientious about the care of our own souls, and we cannot be so full of hubris as to think that false teaching or lax practice can never impact us. It can, and it will. Finally, (3) we love and care enough about the souls of our neighbors enough that we want to give a clear, untarnished testimony to the truth. That means both witnessing to the truth and standing against error.

Let's apply these principles to the question of whether someone outside our fellowship can sing at a wedding. Aunt Matilda, a member of a local nondenominational church, wants to sing a solo, and we patiently explain that she cannot. Why not? (1) We would vet the song, so we can be confident that the words are *echt*. No problem there; the proclaimed truth is not being compromised. (2) Since the words are orthodox, we are not going to be exposed to false doctrine. Our souls will not be endangered. (3) But looming large is this big problem that if we allow Aunt Matilda to participate in our worship service we are sending a powerful message to her and to everyone else who knows her that the doctrinal differences between our church and hers are insignificant, that we're all one big happy Christian family, and that church membership doesn't matter. *We would be sending an unclear confession, and we would be allowing error to stand alongside the truth as an equal.* So we must gently say no, for confessional reasons.

The same applies to participation in Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts. Could a congregation sponsor its own troop and filter BSA materials, so that the boys are not exposed to anything unbiblical? Probably. Could that troop abstain from participation in national jamborees and joint events with other troops that might compromise fellowship? Perhaps. But the mere affiliation with the BSA organization aligns that troop and that congregation with everything BSA stands for. *Their confession becomes our confession by association.* So we cannot participate, for confessional reasons.

Participation in a free conference is something of a different animal, since it is clearly communicated from the start that such a venue is merely a forum for discussion. Even in such environs, though, we must be careful that we are not exposing ourselves to false proclamation and becoming tolerant of error.

Applications of these core principles are beyond number. Can we use materials from heterodox sources, as long as they're properly vetted and filtered? Can we participate in community organizations with sectarian overtones? Can we have members outside our fellowship serving on governing boards? The list goes on and on.

In these and other scenarios, in addition to vigilance for the truth and concern for our own souls, we always want to ask: *What message am I sending with my actions? What confession am I giving to those who are watching?* Then give our answer with gentleness and respect.

¡Adiós, 2929! The WELS no longer owns the property located at 2929 N Mayfair Rd. The sale of the building was closed on May 2. This summer the synod administration has now moved to the new administration building at N16

W23377 Stone Ridge Drive, Waukesha, WI, 53188. About 300 area visitors toured the new Center for Mission and Ministry at the open house held on October 9. The building is both extremely functional in its design and layout and very well-appointed in its trim and finish. The total cost of the building, including remodeling and moving costs, was about \$4 million. About \$1.8 million of that was paid from the building fund (\$1.2m) and operational funds, and the remainder was funded by the sale of 2929.

WELS VEBA rates posted. New WELS VEBA rates for 2014 are posted at the WELS Benefit Plans Office website. Premium rates reflect an increase of only 7.2% year-over-year—a rate increase that is virtually unheard of in today's climate of health coverage uncertainty. (The number would have been lower, were it not for the additional 2% increase resulting from compliance with the Affordable Care Act.) If you are not currently insured under WELS VEBA, you may wish to do some checking to see if WELS VEBA is a competitive and cost-effective alternative to your current healthcare plan. For more information visit welsbpo.net.

WELS Connection. Is your congregation making use of the WELS Connection video? Over 80 congregations in our district are not using this valuable resource. Gone are the days when the videos may have highlighted novelties and out-of-the-box ministry plans that appealed only to a limited audience. These days the videos are focusing almost exclusively on work that we do together as a synod. The videos are an excellent way to help our members appreciate their connection to their synod and to foster support for our shared gospel ministry. The cost of a one-year subscription is only \$95 for a subscription to downloadable files and \$105 to have a DVD mailed to you.

Funding for the synod's mission and ministry. Congregation mission offerings (CMO) are still the primary vehicle for supporting the synod's work. Our synod's ministry plan is predicated upon a CMO increase of 4% in 2014. We continue to encourage all of our congregations to participate in the work we do together as a synod through the support of offerings. The 2013 CMO remittance deadline is January 9, 2014. The deadline to set your 2014 CMO subscription online is February 7, 2014. That is also the deadline for submitting your 2013 congregation statistics.

Early childhood. Construction of the new early childhood learning center at Martin Luther College (MLC) is nearing completion. As of the latest number I have, just under \$180,000 remained to meet the targeted goal of \$4 million for the *Let the Children Come* capital campaign. Early childhood education (ECE) is the fastest growing ministry segment across our synod. The number of early childhood ministries has surpassed the number of elementary schools.

Heritage and Hope: Remembering . . . Rejoicing. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's 150th anniversary thank-offering campaign began in earnest after Labor Day. WLS President Paul Wendland will be accompanying MCG counselors this fall on donor visits to encourage offerings. To date, over \$300,000 in gifts had been received. A special anniversary celebration will be held at the seminary on November 17.

Assignment of ministerial candidates. Nearly all of the eligible candidates from Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were assigned to calls this year on assignment day. The COP continues actively to seek placement for the candidates who remain. They are few, but each is a well-trained gift from the Lord who is eager to serve, and we don't want workers standing idle in the marketplace. Next year (2014) the number of available candidates for assignment from the seminary will be very low—around 22. Our synod is starting to feel the impact of lower enrollment in our synod schools over the past few years.

Pastor mentoring program. All seminary graduates placed by the assignment committee are now being paired with a pastor mentor. The mentor's role is to support the circuit pastor and district president in offering advice, encouragement, and guidance to pastors who are just beginning their ministries. The mentoring relationship is in place for two years.

Peaceful release from a call for financial reasons. Concerns stemming from calls eliminated for financial reasons in the recent economic downturn have led the COP to spend considerable time addressing the question of how and when a call may be terminated for financial reasons. A guiding principles document has been drafted that encourages congregations to take appropriate steps to avoid pitfalls associated with such position eliminations. If you are facing this situation in your congregation, please contact me for a copy of the document.

COP policy in cases involving pornography. Growing concern about called workers succumbing to the temptation to view pornographic material, particularly on the Internet, has led to the drafting of a policy to help bring consistency to our treatment of such cases. Of primary importance is the understanding that our goal is to lead a straying brother to repentance, absolution, and healing. Each case presents its own circumstances that will inevitably alter the course of action and outcome. The COP document, which deals with both prevention and restoration, is in the final stages of editing. A WELS parachurch organization called "Conquerors through Christ" exists to help those who are struggling with pornography. For more information visit www.conquerorsthroughchrist.net.

Ad-Hoc Commission II (AHC2). The 2013 synod convention authorized the appointment of another synod-wide ad-hoc commission to serve as a think tank geared toward synodical improvement in various areas. I have been asked to serve as the COP representative to the AHC2, which will have its first meeting on October 31 of this year. If you have areas of concern that you would like to see addressed by the AHC2, please forward them to me. If you can come up with a better name than AHC2, we're all ears!

Congregation bylaw revision. Primarily in response to developments in California on legal cases pertaining to marriage and sexuality, our district constitution committee has done some excellent work in drafting some boilerplate language for congregations to adopt into their bylaws, if they choose to. (Neither the COP nor the district constitution committee is specifically recommending that congregations take such measures.) Using the template language allows congregations to use verbiage that is consistent and originates within our fellowship, rather than having to search the Internet or other sources for starting language. If a congregation incorporates the language verbatim, as drafted by the committee, that bylaws revision will not require review by the district constitution committee prior to adoption. (A revised copy of your constitution and bylaws should still be sent to the committee following any adopted changes.)

Pre-call meetings. It is common practice for the district president to conduct a pre-call meeting with congregations initiating the process of calling a pastor. The Commission for Lutheran Schools is now strongly urging all district presidents to adopt the practice of conducting a pre-call meeting before a congregation calls for a principal. If your congregation is looking at filling a principal vacancy in its elementary school, please take this into consideration and contact me early in the process, so that we can plan accordingly.

Forward in Christ reporter. Is your congregation or elementary school celebrating a major milestone? Are you doing something that might generate broader interest across the synod? Pastor Michael Schroeder of Wildomar, California, is our district's *Forward in Christ* (FIC) reporter. Please pass along items of interest to Mike, so that he can relay them for publication in FIC.

2014 marks the 100th anniversary of *Forward in Christ*. This coming year the magazine will be filled not only with article series commemorating the past 100 years, but with articles on topics suggested by numerous contributors from around the synod. Another series in the new year will feature one synodical district every month. Our Arizona-California District will be featured in the April 2014 issue. During that month FIC will be sending a number of copies of the magazine to congregations that don't have bulk subscriptions in hopes of stimulating interest and generating subscriptions.

If you don't do so already, consider a bulk subscription to *Forward in Christ* for your congregation. It's a great way to help our members grow spiritually from the articles and Bible studies in the magazine, and it helps us all stay connected to our synod.

Cross of Christ, Las Cruces, New Mexico. The congregation held its first service in a new rented facility on August 25, with 57 in attendance. Jim Connell requested and received CRM status, and the congregation has formally called him to serve in a shared-time ministry.

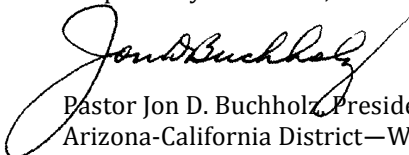
A look ahead. The COP continues to work proactively on long-range projects and to address long-term synodical needs. The ministerial health of our congregations and called workers is of great importance, as we strive to maintain a solid, confessional Lutheran identity to share God's pure Word with our world.

Trip to Israel. From November 4 through November 13 I will be traveling to Israel on a personal hosting trip to the Holy Land. During that time I will have limited e-mail access. Communication pertaining to district matters in my absence should be directed to First Vice President Steve Degner or to Second Vice President David Clark.

Retirement. Mr. Vern Caulk, Ministry of Christian Giving counselor for our district, has announced his intention to retire as of December 31. The COP will be calling a replacement for Mr. Caulk in the near future. We thank Vern for his service and wish him God's blessings in his retirement.

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. —1 Peter 3:15, 16

Respectfully submitted,


Pastor Jon D. Buchholz, President
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District Activity — June 2013 to October 2013

Pastor vacancies

- The vacancy at St. John, Victorville, Calif., is being served by Pastor David Valleskey. At present the congregation has not made plans to call.
- While not vacant, Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, Nev., is without full-time pastoral service, as Pastor John Beck recovers from a stroke in 2012. Pastor Si Krueger is serving the congregation on an interim basis. On October 27, Nathan Scharf returned the call to serve the congregation as lead associate. The congregation plans to call again on November 11.
- Green Valley, Henderson, Nevada, is calling for an associate pastor. Pastor Jonathan Semro received the call on Oct. 20.
- Christ the Vine, Temecula, Calif., is vacant following the retirement of Pastor H. Curtis Lyon on May 26. Their request for a graduate from the assignment committee was unable to be filled. Patrick Freese served the vacancy through the summer, followed by Lowell Smith. I have not received further communication about the congregation's plans to call.
- Ascension, Escondido, Calif., is vacant following the departure of Aaron Glaeske this summer. The congregation plans to be served by a vacancy pastor through the end of this year before proceeding with a call. Herman John is presently serving that vacancy.
- Peace, Sahuarita, Ariz., is vacant following Thomas Bernthal's resignation for personal reasons. Timothy Bourmann declined the call on October 19. The congregation has not set a new date for a call meeting.
- The Administrative Committee for Africa (ACA) is chaired by our district member Pastor Kevin Schultz. As a result, calls to that mission field are coordinated through our district. Dan Kroll is considering the call to serve as Missionary to Cameroon.
- Prince of Peace, Yuma, Ariz., will be vacant following Richard Kugler's retirement effective December 31. The congregation is planning to extend its first call on November 24, 2013.

Pastor call activity

- Thomas Bernthal was granted a peaceful release from his call to Peace, Sahuarita, Ariz., for personal reasons, effective June 2, 2013.
- Rev. Jonathan Kehren returned a call to Tree of Life, Cary, North Carolina, on June 13, 2013.
- Rev. Johann Caauwe returned a call to teach German at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, on July 27, 2013.
- Rev. Douglas Weiser (Calvary, Bellevue, Wash.) accepted the call to serve as part-time Nigeria liaison on August 26, 2013.
- Rev. Daniel Schroeder returned a call to Salem, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on August 29, 2013.
- Rev. Paul Rutschow returned a call to First, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, on August 31, 2013.
- Rev. Matthew Ewart returned a call to St. Mark, Salina, Kansas, on September 14, 2013.
- Rev. David Parsons returned a call to Peace, Sahuarita, and Bethlehem, Benson, Ariz., on September 18, 2013.
- Rev. Dan Kroll received a call from the ACA to serve as missionary to Cameroon on September 22, 2013.
- Rev. Aaron Boehm received a call to serve as mission explorer to Carbon Valley, Colo., on October 14, 2013.
- Rev. Joshua Stahmann returned a call to serve as editor at Northwestern Publishing House on October 31, 2013.

Installations – Pastors

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| • Rev. Joon Ho "Paul" Chung | Living Stone Korean, Thousand Oaks, Calif. | June 2, 2013 |
| • Rev. Tong Xing Yang* | Fresno Hmong Outreach, Fresno, Calif. | June 16, 2013 |
| • Rev. Chu Hua Thao* | St. Peter Hmong, Clovis, Calif. | June 16, 2013 |

*Indicates ordination into the pastoral ministry.

Transfers in – Pastors and male teachers

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| • Kevin Bode | Southeast Wisconsin District | July 2013 |
| • E. John Fredrich | South Central District | July 2013 |
| • Michal Homan | Minnesota District | July 2013 |

Transfers out – Pastors and male teachers

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| • Matthew Foxen | Western Wisconsin District | July 2013 |
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Pastor candidate assignments

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| • Daniel (Chu Hua) Thao | St. Peter Hmong, Clovis, Calif. | May 23, 2013 |
| • Tong Xing Yang | Fresno Hmong Outreach, Fresno, Calif. | May 23, 2013 |
| • Gregory Hein | South Gilbert New Mission, Gilbert, Ariz. | May 23, 2013 |

Vacancies in district offices

- The position of circuit pastor for the Rio Grande Circuit is vacant.
- The position of circuit pastor for the Mountain View Circuit is vacant.

Teacher call activity

- Stephanie Pagel resigned her call to Peridot Lutheran, Peridot, Ariz., effective the end of the school year.
- Kristal Fillner resigned her call to Apostles', San Jose, Calif., effective the end of the school year.
- Katie Jewell resigned her call to Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona, effective the end of the school year.

- Kevin Bode accepted a call to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz., on May 11, 2013.
- Andrea Oppermann accepted the call to serve as music director at Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz., on May 24, 2013.
- Nicole Hintz accepted a call to Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz., on May 26, 2013.
- E. John Fredrich accepted the call to serve as principal of Grace, Glendale, Ariz., on May 29, 2013.
- Michael Homan accepted the call to serve as principal of Reformation, San Diego, Calif., on June 19, 2013.
- Matthew Foxen accepted a call to Trinity-St. Luke's, Watertown, Wisconsin, on July 2, 2013.
- John Campbell accepted the call to serve as principal of Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona, on July 2, 2013.
- Justine Smith accepted a call to Peace, Kissimmee, Florida, on July 3, 2013.
- Nancy Leifer accepted a call to Hope, Penryn, on July 7, 2013.
- Melissa Nehls accepted a call to St. Paul's First, North Hollywood, Calif., on July 8, 2013.
- Joan Rendell retired from Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz., on August 4, 2013.
- Maria Else accepted a call to Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz., on August 4, 2013.
- Dawn Goetz accepted a call to King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif., on August 16, 2013.

Teacher candidate assignments

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| • Erika Steuck | Ascension, Escondido, Calif. | May 18, 2013. |
| • Sara Schmeling | California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif. | May 18, 2013. |
| • Heidi Heckmann | Hope, Penryn, Calif. | May 18, 2013. |
| • Thomas Stelter | Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona | May 18, 2013 |

Retirement

- Pastor Richard Kugler has announced his plans to retire from Prince of Peace, Yuma, Arizona, on December 31, 2013
- Mr. Vern Caulk has announced his retirement as Ministry of Christian Giving Counselor on December 31, 2013.
- Pastor Kerry Kronebusch has announced his retirement from Apostles', San Jose, California, on July 1, 2014

With the Lord

- Robert W Adickes, retired principal and teacher at Arizona Lutheran Academy, was called home to heaven on May 31, 2013. His Christian memorial service was held on June 15, 2013, at Arizona Lutheran Academy.
- Rev. Lynn A Schroeder rested from his earthly labors on September 17, 2013. Christian funeral services were held in Chula Vista, Calif., and Watertown, Wisconsin.
- Laura J Clark, active teacher at East Fork, was taken home to heaven suddenly and unexpectedly on October 6, 2013. Her Christian funeral was held at Grace, San Carlos, Arizona, on October 12, 2013.
- Roger A "RAS" Sievert, retired principal and teacher, was taken to eternal glory on October 12, 2013. His Christian memorial service was held on October 19, 2013, at Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona.

School closing

- Trinity, El Paso, Texas, closed its Lutheran Elementary School effective the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

School opening

- Immanuel, Taylor, Arizona, opened for its first year of elementary school operations in the fall of 2013.

Rededication

- Shepherd in the Pines, McNary, Arizona, held a rededication service on October 6, 2013

Please bring to my attention any corrections to the above report.