



Arizona-California District—WELS Report of the District President

Easter 2015

While they were still talking about this [appearance to the Emmaus disciples], Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:36-39, 45).

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:17, 20).

As I read through various selections from Scripture (the above, of course, are just a few), I am impressed at how many times the Christians testified to the reality of the resurrection. Jesus wanted his disciples to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was alive and with them. The disciples reported this good news to others because they wanted others to know the same truth.

Resurrections from the dead don't happen often. Some people claim that they were "dead" on the table in the hospital before the medical staff brought them back. But Jesus didn't just flatline for a few seconds or a couple minutes on the table before his heart was restarted. His human soul had vacated his body. His lifeless body was pierced and drained of blood. His pale corpse was wrapped and laid in a tomb, where it rested for three days.

We know what death is about. We have seen it in all its ugliness. The person who is deceased is *gone*. There's no waking up. There's no snapping out of it. There's nothing left but a shell.

But on the morning of the resurrection something miraculous and beyond human comprehension happened. Jesus' human body was again filled with his soul. His heart began to beat again. His brain began to function again. The real, living Jesus left the tomb behind. Not only was he vibrant and fully alive, but he was exalted, glorified and restored to the glory he had with the Father before all worlds were created.

Someone who rises from the dead is worth listening to.

Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection. If Christ has not been raised, then death is still in control. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, we are confident that he is the Son of God (Romans 1:4), and that he holds the keys to death and hell (Revelation 1:18). We live in the afterglow of Jesus' resurrection. We worship our living Lord. The one who speaks to us, dries our tears, and fills us with certain hope and comfort is our Jesus: our Redeemer, our Savior, our Friend.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Salaries and compensation

I switch gears from the heavenly to the earthbound, to a subject much more pedestrian, yet still one that is infused with resurrection victory and power: salaries and compensation. Lately I'm finding myself more and more concerned with the level of compensation our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers are receiving. There are a lot of reasons for this, and some of the reasons are more difficult to address.

I'm asking all congregations to review compensation for their called workers to gauge their compensation against the standard of synod mission code. (Self-supporting congregations are not obligated to "pay code," of course, but it is an excellent standard to index our compensation.)

Please remember that code is not just the base salary matrix (rows and columns) available from the synod HR department. The synod code standard includes the following components:

- Base salary (rows of experience, columns of responsibility).
- Regional COLA adjustment (ACCRA COLI or equivalent, housing not included).
- Housing compensation (HUD FMR for a 3 BR home) or residence provided.

- 2% housing equity allowance if a residence is provided in lieu of an allowance.
- Social Security stipend of 7.65% for male called workers.
- WELS VEBA or equivalent health plan. Plan 2 (\$1,000 deductible) is the baseline.
- Reimbursement for mileage and church/school-related expenses.

If the congregation is requesting a graduate from MLC or from the seminary, please compensate the graduate at synod code or higher. If you aren't, please submit a written plan to get there within three years. Please don't provide one compensation number to the graduate at assignment and then renege when the candidate arrives.

Two thoughts to share:

- A Care Committee for Called Workers (CCCW) can be a tremendous blessing when it comes to advocating for the welfare of the called workers, not only on compensation issues but in other areas. Our district Special Ministries Commission has information available to help you establish a CCCW in your congregation.
- If you would like me to meet with your congregation or church council to discuss compensation issues, I am happy to do so. This can put the crosshairs on me and take the target off your back.

ALA land purchase. Arizona Lutheran Academy has a tremendous opportunity that just fell into its lap, and it's an opportunity that must be seized. ALA has the chance to purchase the 3.6 acre parcel just north of its campus, directly on the corner of 27th Avenue and Southern for just over \$474,000. This is at a 50% discount to the current market for that land. The earnest money in the amount of \$25,000 that is needed to sign a contract and move forward with the deal was received in just a couple of days, and the contract was signed on April 30. We have until Sept. 30 to raise the rest of the money through cash and financing. This may be the last opportunity to expand the campus footprint for generations to come. This is a huge opportunity for God's people to participate in making this happen! It would be tremendous if a couple hundred generous gifts of over \$1,000, a few hundred more generous gifts of \$500, and many more generous gifts of every size could come together to make this happen. This can also be a springboard for the other capital needs that ALA is facing.

If you can participate in this exciting opportunity, or if you have people in your congregation with a heart for ALA and the means to support this effort, please talk to me or speak with John Sebald at ALA.

Funding for the synod's mission and ministry. Online reporting of Congregational Mission Offerings (CMO) subscriptions and statistical reporting has been the norm for a couple of years now. Across the synod 97% of congregations entered CMO subscriptions. CMO is the primary support mechanism for our synod's ministry at home and around the world.

2015 CMO progress for our district are as follows:

Communicant members	2015 Subscriptions	First Qtr Received	Percentage of subscription	Offerings per communicant
17,343	\$1,439,475	\$313,634.98	21.7%	\$18.08

Synod-wide, year-over-year subscriptions from 2013 to 2014 increased by 3%. At the end of 2014, CMO receipts surpassed subscription by 4/10 of 1%, for a net actual giving at 100.4% of subscriptions. However, numbers for 2015 are cause for concern. CMO subscriptions synod-wide decreased by 1.8% from 2014 to 2015. Our Arizona-California District subscriptions decreased by 0.9%. The Synodical Council (SC) is considering how to address this shortfall. There are several options: (1) Reduce synodical ministries by about \$400,000, adding to reductions that have already been made. (2) Look to the Financial Stabilization Fund (FSF) to cover the shortfall. (3) A combination of 1 and 2. (4) Use the FSF but strive to underspend budgets without mandating cuts.

In real dollars, CMO has not increased since 2007. We really do need to identify why this has happened and determine what we can do to reverse it, since we are at the point where efficiencies and other budget reduction strategies will no longer help offset the decrease in CMO.

Ministerial candidates. The seminary is projecting that 30 seminary seniors will present themselves for assignment, along with 30 middlers for assignment as vicars. Only one congregation in our district will be receiving a vicar this year; that's Water of Life, Las Vegas.

From Martin Luther College a total of 89 candidates are presenting for assignment in the following categories: 9 ECE; 41 Elementary; 4 ECE/Elementary; 28 Elementary-Secondary; 7 Secondary.

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Light of God's Word. The COP doctrine committee's review of this document is complete, and a draft revision has been presented to the full COP for approval. The final approval anticipated in April didn't quite happen this year, so the document is still in final draft form.

The document includes revisions in three key areas. First, new language has been incorporated to address the impact of sexual temptations that have arisen in recent decades and their impact on marriage, particularly those resulting from the Internet. Second, the sections on remarriage after divorce have been strengthened to recognize that there are situations where remarriage may not be a possibility for a Christian who desires to honor the Lord. Third, a brief section has been included to address the phenomenon of "gay marriage" that is sweeping the nation. The revised document refrains from setting out rules to cover every situation but underscores principles that ministers will apply with pastoral discernment.

District Help Team. At the 2014 Arizona-California District Convention our district approved implementation of a district Help Team for the purpose of offering support to called workers who leaving the ministry. Part of the implementation of the district resolution is the election or appointment of one pastor and one teacher from each of the five conferences. The process for election is not specified. This conference may elect a teacher (male or female) to serve as a member of the Help Team. The Help Team currently assembled looks like this:

- Rev. Ross Else, Help Team Chairman (2020)
- Apache Conference: *pastor vacant* *teacher vacant*
- Black Canyon: *pastor vacant* *teacher vacant*
- Gadsden Conference: *pastor vacant* *teacher vacant*
- Southern California: H. Curtis Lyon (2021) *teacher vacant*
- Northern California: Jon Kehren (2021) *teacher vacant*

Training and a resource reference guide are provided to Help Team members.

Military Services Committee. The COP is in the process of commissioning a study concerning participation in military chaplaincy by WELS clergy. The study committee will evaluate whether under current military policy and practice it is both (a) theologically permissible to participate and (b) wise from a practical standpoint. Pastor Hans Caauwe has agreed to serve from our district.

Congregational Counseling Commission (CCC). The Congregational Counseling Commission was established by the Conference of Presidents to provide short-term assessment and advice to congregations seeking to identify ways to improve their ministry. Pastor Jonathan Hein has been called by the COP to serve as the director of the CCC. This past fall thirty pastors across the synod took part in the CCC training program. From our district, Pastor Aaron Boehm, Pastor Brian Doebler, and Pastor Adam Mueller have received training as congregational counselors.

The CCC takes a four-step approach to serving congregations:

1. The congregation provides a self-analysis and data to the CCC for review and assessment.
2. The CCC does a week-long on-site assessment for the congregation.
3. The CCC provides a summary report back to the congregation identifying areas for strengthening and offering brotherly encouragement and suggestion.
4. The congregation implements the suggestions.

The role of our district CCC counselors is to provide a fresh set of eyes, along with brotherly encouragement, and to make pastors and congregations aware of existing resources that are available. The entire process, from evaluation to implementation, along with the encouragement that comes along the way, is expected to take the better part of a year. The CCC delivers considerable “bang for the buck,” at a very modest cost of only \$500 for participation.

Demand for the services of the CCC is already very strong across the synod. I believe the CCC is booked through the end of 2015. More information about the program is available online, along with resources for congregation leaders on the WELS Connect site.

WELS. WELS VEBA is deeply concerned about the impact that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will have on WELS VEBA participation. Younger called workers might find more favorable rates through a state- or federally-sponsored exchange, but older called workers' rates will be significantly higher. If a significant number of younger called workers choose to leave WELS VEBA for cheaper exchange plans, the WELS VEBA program will very quickly become unviable. About 85% of WELS congregations currently offer a WELS VEBA plan for medical insurance.

From a compensation standpoint, I'm concerned that the coverage offered by other plans is not comparable to that of VEBA. Only too late—as in cases of a pregnancy, major medical event, or long-term disability—do the congregation and called worker find out that the coverage is inadequate, and a serious burden is placed upon the called worker and family.

If your congregation is not currently using WELS VEBA or is considering switching away from WELS VEBA, please make sure that you understand exactly what you will be getting. Most inexpensive exchange plans do not offer the same coverage that WELS VEBA does. Your exchange plan will not be transferable from state to state, if you take a call. Open enrollment periods for WELS VEBA are becoming much less frequent, which means that re-entry into the program may be very difficult. You can anticipate much higher premiums and reduced coverage from an exchange plan, as you age.

The changing healthcare landscape underscores the blessings we have enjoyed through WELS VEBA. Please emphasize these blessings to your congregation's leaders, if there is interest in changing medical insurance providers.

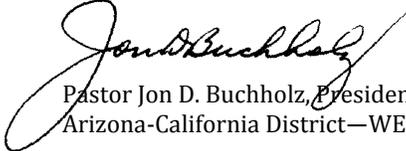
In our prayers.

- Mr. Paul Krause, teacher and coach at Pilgrim Lutheran School, Mesa, Arizona, was diagnosed last year with colon cancer. In late February he underwent surgery to remove the mass. That surgery went well, and the mass was taken out, but there are indications that some spots of cancer still remain. He is continuing a regimen of chemotherapy and radiation. Please remember him and his family in your prayers.

- Mr. Peter Bauer, teacher at Grace Lutheran School, Glendale, Arizona, has been working through health problems. He will be retiring at the end of this school year.
- Please pray for the Lord's blessing upon all of our congregations and schools, especially in fields where ministries are struggling. There are many obstacles to gospel ministry in these last days.

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." (Lamentations 3:22-24).

Respectfully submitted,



Pastor Jon D. Buchholz, President
Arizona-California District—WELS

(480) 344-3782 office
jonbuchholz@msn.com
azcadistrict.com

District Activity — January 2015 to May 2015

Pastor vacancies

- The vacancy at St. John, Victorville, Calif., is being served by Pastor H. Curtis Lyon. In the future, the congregation may continue to be served as a vacancy or as a preaching station.
- Redeemer, Tucson, Arizona, is calling for the position of associate pastor. Rev. David Rosenau was called on May 3.
- Green Valley, Henderson, Nevada, is planning to request a graduate from the assignment committee for the position of associate pastor.
- Grace, Tucson, Arizona, has expanded to become a four-site congregation, serving the University District of Tucson, Vail, Benson, and Sahuarita. Grace plans to call again on May 9.
- The Administrative Committee for Native American Missions (ACNAM) is calling for the position of Field Coordinator on the Native American field. Dr. Scott Gostchalk returned the call on May 1.
- Mt. Olive, Las Vegas, Nevada, is being served by Rev. Fred Piepenbrink as vacancy pastor. The congregation is requesting a graduate through the assignment committee.
- Rev. Curt Grube has announced his plans to retire, with an exact date uncertain. Holy Cross, Tucson, is planning to call on May 10, 2015.
- Rev. Jeff Smith has announced his plans to retire effective August 31, 2015. Living Word, Petaluma, Calif., is considering the possibility of extending a two-year call to bridge a transition in the ministry there.

Pastor call activity

- Rev. Joel Sutton declined a call to Trinity, Temple, Texas on January 29, 2015.
- Rev. Steve Hillmer declined a call to Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, on February 5, 2015.
- Rev. Jeffery Enderle declined a call to Eastside, Madison, Wisconsin, on January 18, 2015.
- Rev. Jason Schmidt declined a call to St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, on January 18, 2015.
- Rev. Jonathan Loescher declined a call to Redeemer, Tucson, Arizona, on February 14, 2015.
- Rev. Matthew Langebartels declined a call to Zion, Valentine, Nebraska, on February 21, 2015.
- Rev. David Parsons declined a call to St. Peter, Dorr, Michigan, on February 21, 2015.
- Rev. Michael Schroeder declined a call to Eastside, Madison, Wisconsin, on February 28, 2015.
- Rev. Joel Sutton declined a call to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Puyallup, Washington, on March 3, 2015.
- Rev. Aaron Mueller declined a call to Victory, Lexington, Kentucky, on March 6, 2015.
- Rev. Michael Carr declined a call to Shepherd of the Hills, Winchester, Virginia, on March 14, 2015.
- Rev. Christopher Schroeder declined a call to St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin, on April 18, 2015.
- Rev. Aaron Boehm declined a call to Christ, Eden Prairie, Minnesota, on April 18, 2015.
- **Rev. Theodore Bodjanac received a call to Palabra de Vida, Detroit, Michigan, on April 26, 2015.**
- **Rev. Nathan Kassulke received a call to Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on April 26, 2015.**
- **Rev. Matthew Vogt received a call to Brooklyn Lutheran, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, on May 3, 2015.**

Peaceful release

- Rev. Theodore Bodjanac was granted a peaceful release from his call to Resurrection, Phoenix, Ariz., on January 11, 2015. Ted is CRM and is actively being used on call lists.

Installations – Pastors

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| • Rev. Mark Jacobson | Grace, Glendale, Arizona | January 11, 2015 |
| • Rev. Paul Schossov | ACTS Director, East Fork, Arizona | January 18, 2015 |

Transfers out – Pastors and male teachers

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| • Rev. James Panning | Minnesota District | January 2015 |
| • Mr. Eric Fillner | Southeastern Wisconsin District | June 2015 |
| • Mr. Christopher Hintz | Pacific Northwest District | June 2015 |
| • Mr. James Hussman | Northern Wisconsin District | June 2015 |

Vacancies in district offices

- Commission on Adult Discipleship Coordinator
- Various Help Team positions for pastors and teachers

Teacher call activity

- Dave Peter accepted a call to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Arizona, on January 2, 2015
- Christopher Hintz accepted a call to Christ the King, Bremerton, Washington, on January 4, 2015.
- Anne Marquardt declined a call to Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on February 3, 2015.
- Jennifer Mangini accepted a call to Reformation, San Diego, California, on January 8, 2015.
- Steven Rosenbaum declined a call to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan, on January 14, 2015.
- Scott Hill declined a call to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wisconsin, on January 14, 2015.
- James Hussman accepted a call to St. Paul, Algoma, Wisconsin, on February 15, 2015.
- Timothy Treder accepted a call to California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., on February 16, 2015.
- Hannah Stahl declined a call to Mt. Olive, Delano, Minnesota, on February 18, 2015.

- Rachel Kramer accepted a call to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minnesota, on February 28, 2015.
- Andrew Plocher accepted a call to Emmaus, Phoenix, Arizona, on February 28, 2015.
- Erica Steuck declined a call to Word of Life, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on March 6, 2015.
- Sara Borck declined a call to St. Peter, Modesto, California, on March 10, 2015.
- Bradley Nehls declined a call to St. Matthew, Iron Ridge, Wisconsin, on March 16, 2015.
- Andrea Indahl accepted a call to Arizona Lutheran Academy, on March 26, 2015.
- Elizabeth Glodowski accepted a call to St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, on March 30, 2015.
- Rebecca Balge accepted a call to Divine Savior, Doral, Florida, on April 4, 2015.
- Steven Springborn accepted a call to Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Nebraska, on April 4, 2015.
- Stephanie Treder accepted a call to Apostles, San Jose, Calif., on April 6, 2015.
- Jessica Seiltz declined a call to Holy Cross, Madison, Wisconsin, on April 9, 2015.
- Daniel Douglas declined a call to St. Paul, Norfolk, Nebraska, on April 10, 2015.
- John Sebald accepted a call to Truth in Love Ministry, Boise, Idaho, on April 10, 2015.
- Timothy Vogel declined a call to St. Matthew, Iron Ridge, Wisconsin, on April 19, 2015.
- **Matthew Sonntag received a call to West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn., on April 19, 2015.**
- Rebecca Toepel accepted a call to St. Peter, Modesto, Calif., on April 23, 2015.
- **Adam Bohl received a call to Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif., on April 26, 2015.**
- **Deanna Rahn received a call to St. John, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on April 27, 2015.**
- **Michael Peek received a call to St. Matthew, Winona, Minnesota, on April 28, 2015.**
- **Craig Kiecker received a call to St. John, Red Wing, Minnesota, on April 29, 2015.**
- Joel Krieger declined a call to Ascension, Escondido, Calif., on May 1, 2015.
- Kate Krieger declined a call to Ascension, Escondido, Calif., on May 1, 2015.
- Mollie Dorn declined a call to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., on May 1, 2015.
- Sarah Gabb accepted a call to Building Blocks Christian Academy, Los Angeles, Calif., on May 2, 2015.
- Jarrod Pfarr declined a call to Cross of Glory, Peoria, Arizona, on May 2, 2015.
- Melissa Nehls accepted a call to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., on May 2, 2015.
- **Brett Bengel received a call to Ascension, Escondido, Calif., on May 3, 2015.**
- **Adrienne Bengel received a call to Ascension, Escondido, Calif., on May 3, 2015.**
- **Candice Learman received a call to Ascension, Escondido, Calif., on May 3, 2015.**
- **Brigetta Guelker received a call to Little Lambs Early Learning Center, La Crescent, Minn., on May 5, 2015.**

Resignations

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| • Scott Indahl | Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Arizona | June 30, 2015 |
| • Youngsin Choi | Apostles, San Jose, California | June 30, 2015 |

Retirements

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| • Lenore Klug | Reformation, San Diego, California | June 30, 2015 |
| • Michael Bahn | California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, California | June 30, 2015 |
| • Peter Bauer | Grace, Glendale, Arizona | June 30, 2015 |
| • Rev. Jeff Smith | Living Word, Petaluma, Calif. | August 31, 2015 |

School closing

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| • St. Stephen Lutheran School, Fallbrook, California | June 30, 2015 |
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With the Lord

- Rev. Em. Harry Marks was called home to heaven on November 6, 2014
- Rev. Em. Armin Keibel was called home to heaven on December 7, 2014
- Retired Teacher Virgil Raasch was called home to heaven on March 14, 2015.

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