

Arizona-California District—WELS Report of the District President

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

We all know that the ministry includes moments of unbounded, exhilarating joy: When we administer Holy Baptism; pronounce words of absolution; see the joy in the face of a new Christian who just grasped what God's grace in Christ really means; hold the hand of the hurting and comfort the dying; see the burden of sin lifted as Jesus' guest leaves the Table. The list of ministry joys goes on and on.

At the same time, we know the ministry includes moments of anguish: Great stress, tension headaches, sleepless nights, brought on by concern for straying souls, pressing schedules, flagging offerings, dwindling attendance, apathy. There is no shortage of hurt, pressure and anxiety that ministers of the gospel feel.

We might have thought we signed up for the ministry because of the fun and promise that preaching the gospel holds. Yeah, we knew there would be some tough times, but we naively didn't realize just how tough. And when we're in the throes of some gut-wrenching ministerial crisis, we're least likely to see it as a privilege to bear the cross of discipleship.

But that's when God's grace and power really shine. When we've been body-slammed, maligned, out-manuevered, and the situation seems completely hopeless, and we wish Elijah's chariot would just come and take us away, that's when God's power is made perfect in weakness.

God's grace abounds, not only in the moments of joy, but especially in the shadow of the cross. May the unbounded love and the limitless strength and the undiminished power of Jesus, his forgiveness and eternal victory, be your joy and your strength, as you rest in him!

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Follow-up on the 2010 district pastors' conference. In the 2010 pastors' conference held in San Jose, California, Pastor Dan Rautenberg presented a paper reviewing J. P. Koehler's essay "Legalism among Us." In the discussion following the paper, I characterized his paper as containing "red herrings." Since the term "red herring" can imply a deliberate attempt to distract or mislead, Dan admonished me for slandering him and damaging his reputation. In the spring of this year, our presidium and I met with Dan to clarify issues surrounding the paper he delivered. I agreed that it was appropriate that I apologize for using the term; I am doing so today.

Suspended from the WELS ministerium

After much prayer, study and careful evaluation, our district presidium made the difficult decision to suspend Paul A. Rydecki from the WELS ministerium and from membership in the Arizona-California District. The suspension was carried out in conformity with Article VII, Section 1, of the District Bylaws and is effective as of October 2, 2012. Paul has affirmed that he does not believe that "God forgave the sin of the world when Jesus died on the cross" (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Apology IV, 103), and he has made it clear that he does not agree with the confession on justification articulated in *This We Believe*. Emmanuel, Las Cruces, New Mexico, will be holding a congregation meeting on October 17, 2012, to decide whether to disaffiliate from the WELS and keep Rydecki as pastor, or to remain with the WELS. Please pray for Paul Rydecki, his family, and his congregation. Please pray for your district presidium members, as we work through difficult issues.

Synodwide Every-Member Visit (EMV)

As part of the synod's long-range plan, the synod is encouraging a synod-wide every-member visit. Initially the EMV was geared toward raising stewardship awareness across the synod. A retooled approach might focus simply on pastoral contact during the first visit, followed by a stewardship emphasis at a later date. As the saying goes, "A house-going pastor makes a church-going people." The Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) is developing resources that can be used for such an effort, including resources for congregations of various sizes. The goal is to complete the visits before the end of 2012. Your circuit pastor should be following up with you to get periodic status updates, as your EMV activity progresses.

Some thoughts to keep in mind:

- Visiting members is not difficult, nor is it an exceptional burden for pastors. Rather, it is a joy for pastors and congregational leaders to share the joy that only comes from Jesus. This is, perhaps, the greatest benefit of the EMV.

- The goal of the EMV is to keep the focus on Jesus—"to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18). His undeserved love for us is the reason and the motivation behind our entire Christian life.
- The goal is that all pastors and congregations will participate. (Congregations that already have an EMV planned for this year can save the materials to use in two years.)

In your prayers

As you know, Pastor John Beck suffered a serious stroke in May of this year. His recovery has been slow but steady, and he is beginning to tackle more challenging ministry tasks, including preaching on a limited basis. Steve Hillmer is serving as vacancy pastor as John recovers, and brothers of the Sierra Circuit are providing additional support. Recently John's wife, Cindy, has been suffering from additional health challenges. Please remember John and Cindy, as well as Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, in your prayers.

CMO program increases needed

As the synod lays out funding plans for the next few years, we're reminded how important the Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) component of the budget is to our synod's work overall. For this past year CMO has been essentially flat overall. Looking to 2013, our synod will need an increase of 3-4% over current CMO numbers to be able to fund planned expansion. As you work with your congregation this fall and into January to set your CMO subscription for 2013, please keep this in mind. Please work with your congregation to encourage a subscription that is at least 3% to 4% above your 2012 subscription.

Healthcare reform and its implications

At its October meeting the Conference of Presidents (COP) received a two-hour briefing on the new healthcare bill ("Obamacare") and its possible implications for our congregations, called workers, and hired staff. Under the new bill, insurance will be made available through state insurance exchanges (think shopping on Travelocity for insurance, only on a state-by-state basis). Some plans may choose not to be available through exchanges (for example, Southwest Airlines doesn't sell tickets through Travelocity). All plans (exchange and non-exchange) must conform to certain minimum coverage requirements, but they may vary widely in the coverage provided, the terms of coverage, and the cost of the plan. Individuals will have the choice what kind of plan they wish to obtain. Certain controversial required covered services, such as contraceptives and abortifacients, may be exempted under a religious exemption, in some circumstances. (The requirement to provide coverage for such services will probably not impact congregations, but it may impact larger church organizations, such as colleges.)

There are a number of aspects of the law that are still being challenged in the courts. The future of this legislation hinges on any number of factors, including the results of this fall's election. In the end, the final results may be very different from what is presently on track to take effect. Projections are that costs will probably go up overall.

MLC Early Childhood Center

Martin Luther College is beginning the second phase, the public phase, of its capital campaign titled "Let the Children Come." The goal of the campaign is to raise \$4 million, primarily to fund construction of a new Early Childhood Learning Center to meet the burgeoning need in our synod for Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers. (The number of Early Childhood Ministries—ECMs—now surpasses the number of elementary schools in the WELS.) The \$4 million goal targets construction of the new learning center, along with providing funding for major deferred maintenance projects at MLC and funding for student assistance. A \$1.25 million challenge grant will provide matching funds for gifts received through June of 2013. If you would like to order campaign materials for "Let the Children Come" for use in your congregation, you can order them through the MLC website.

Ministry of Christian Giving call accepted

Pastor Kurt Lueneberg has accepted the call to serve as Director of Christian Giving for the WELS, the position formerly held by the retiring Pastor Dave Liggett.

Doctrine Committee issues The COP Doctrine Committee is working through a number of doctrinal issues, including:

- The practice of fellowship in representative choirs and other musical groups of our Lutheran high schools and colleges. We want to strive for consistency and a clear confession in the testimony that is given by musical groups that perform in worship services. Especially we want to emphasize the practice of Christian fellowship as a loving testimony to Jesus' truth, carried out in genuine Christian concern for the souls of others and our own souls, lest we ourselves be led astray.
- A study of marriage, adultery, desertion, divorce, and remarriage in the light of modern temptations, including pornography, online affairs, "sexting," and the like. We recognize that modern ways of distorting God's gift of sexuality are simply old sins in new forms. The COP is studying especially how these sins relate to scriptural guidelines on marital unfaithfulness and unbelieving desertion as permissible grounds for divorce.
- Recommendation regarding gluten-free wafers. The demand for Communion wafers that are gluten-free due to health concerns (e.g., Celiac Disease, gluten intolerance) appears to be on the rise. Questions have been raised whether some of the wafers marketed as "gluten-free" are suitable for tendering the body of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, due to their composition. It is a fair question whether a composition of rice flour, binders, and other ingredients suitably meets the definition of "bread."

Those concerned about the composition of gluten-free wafers may consider the following as an acceptable alternative: A group of Benedictine sisters has produced a wheat-based bread that is so low in gluten that it appears to present little or no risk to communicants with gluten sensitivities. The wafers are available at: <http://www.altarbreadsbpa.com/lowgluten.php>.

Teacher call lists

The calling window for teachers opens on November 1. Due to the vacancy in the Commission for Lutheran Schools (CLS) position vacated by Jeff Inniger, the lead time for teacher call lists generated by the CLS will probably be longer than it has been in the past. Please allow 15 business days when requesting a teacher call list.

CLS Induction fee for new teachers

The CLS is formalizing the induction fee for new graduate teachers assigned. The fee to the congregation will be \$1,000 per candidate for each of the first two years that the candidate serves. The fee helps cover costs of mentoring new graduates and helping them transition into their field of labor.

Vicar placements

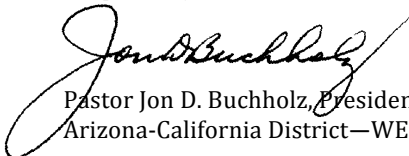
This year 36 seminary middlers are preparing for vicar assignment in May of 2013. Some 10-13 of these placements will not be in Vicar-in-Mission (VIM) settings. Some non-VIM congregations may qualify for funding support to help defray the cost of a vicar. If you feel that your congregation would be a strong setting to help advance the training of a seminary student during his vicar year, please let me know.

Blessings in ministry

Yesterday in the meeting of the District Council, each circuit pastor shared a quick summary of ministry activities, highlights, and challenges taking place in the congregations of his circuit. There are ministry challenges, without question, but most encouraging is to see the number of congregations where faithful work is being done, where the Lord is blessing faithful labors, and where the Lord is using his powerful gospel to pierce the darkness. It might be easy to focus on challenges and to lament the setbacks that we see here and there, but, brothers, there is a lot of excellent, faithful ministry being carried out all over our district, and for this we give thanks and rejoice.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-6).

Respectfully submitted,



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

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Installations – Teachers

- Mollie Dorn* Mt. Calvary, Redding, California July 1, 2012
- Cassandra Gryns* Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona July 1, 2012
- Kelly Loberger Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona July 1, 2012
- Hannah Horn* Our Saviour (ELS), Lake Havasu City, Arizona July 8, 2012
- Cecilia Diaz Delgadillo* Reformation, San Diego, California July 22, 2012
- Mary Jones Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, California July 29, 2012
- Timothy Vogel Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, California July 29, 2012
- Valerie Follendorf Redeemer, Tucson, Arizona August 5, 2012
- Janell Brown Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona August 5, 2012
- Jessica Seiltz* Redeemer, Tucson, Arizona August 5, 2012
- Lynnette Stahmann Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona August 5, 2012
- Alyssa Wascher* Mt. Olive, Las Vegas, Nevada August 5, 2012
- Megan Watson* Redeemer, Tucson, Arizona August 5, 2012
- Karl Bauer St. Paul's First, North Hollywood, California August 12, 2012
- Peter Buege King of Kings, Garden Grove, California August 12, 2012
- John Campbell King of Kings, Garden Grove, California August 12, 2012
- Martha Dellalonga King of Kings, Garden Grove, California August 12, 2012
- Nicole Rosenbaum* Pilgrim, Mesa, Arizona August 12, 2012
- Amy Springborn Cross of Glory, Peoria, Arizona August 12, 2012
- Darren Vogt* East Fork, East Fork, Arizona August 12, 2012
- Scott Loberger Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Arizona August 13, 2012
- Stacey Aguilar St. Stephen, Fallbrook, California August 19, 2012
- Lynn "Charlie" Kuether Calvary, Chandler, Arizona August 19, 2012
- Katherine Georgson* California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, California August 19, 2012
- David Peter California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, California August 19, 2012
- Stephanie Treder Apostles', San Jose, California August 19, 2012
- Jacob Unke* California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, California August 19, 2012
- Mandee Heiny Green Valley, Henderson, Nevada August 26, 2012
- Christine Swoboda Shepherd, Albuquerque, New Mexico August 26, 2012
- Bethany Holter Reformation, San Diego, California August 28, 2012
- Kathy Lee Gloria Dei, Belmont, California Date unknown

* Indicates commissioning into the teaching ministry

Resignations – Teachers

- Karl "Willie" Grebe King of Kings, Garden Grove, California June 17, 2012
- Kelly Loberger Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona July 16, 2012

Appointments to district offices

- Rev. Matthew Vogt District Mission Board September 2012
- Rev. Nathan Kassulke Saguario Circuit Pastor September 2012

Resignations from district offices

- Rev. Paul Rydecki Rio Grande Circuit Pastor August 2012
- Rev. Daniel Wagenknecht District Mission Board September 2012
- Rev. Ronald Koehler III Saguario Circuit Pastor September 2012
- Rev. Andrew Luehring Apache Circuit Pastor October 2012

Congregations removed from WELS membership

- St. Paul, Douglas, Arizona June 2012
- Grace, Bisbee, Arizona June 2012

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