

A long-awaited return

It appears that the time we have been waiting for—when we can again gather in church for Word and sacrament—has arrived or will arrive shortly. Some states have already begun to relax or even remove restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 virus. In most places further relaxing of restrictions seems to be coming in the days and weeks ahead.

That means your congregation has probably already been making plans to resume public worship at some time in the coming weeks. (Some congregations resumed limited public worship last Sunday.) At least on a temporary basis, those plans will likely take into consideration common-sense measures to reduce the possibility of spreading the virus. Plans may also call for voluntarily following guidelines provided by federal, state, and local health agencies. As we make these decisions, it will be important for congregations to be aware of what restrictions apply to them so they may evangelically apply biblical principles in keeping with the Fourth Commandment, as we also seek to honor the Third Commandment.

We will also want to act evangelically and respectfully because we realize our members and neighboring congregations may have many different approaches, opinions, or comfort levels. As we try to walk through the various governmental and medical concerns, guidelines, and recommendations, we also want to have a balanced spiritual concern toward our members, realizing some will want to gather in worship as soon as possible and others will still feel hesitant for a while. There also will be divided human opinions on the wisdom of beginning to open up or not to open up at all at this time. We want to encourage everyone to be patient with everybody else and to make those decisions in Christian love and with much prayer.

I pray the Lord has kept you safe and healthy under his protection during these weeks. I also pray the Lord has blessed your congregation's ministry during this time, since the Word always continues to accomplish God's purpose. And I further pray for the members of your congregations, especially if they are suffering from illness or from any of the other attendant difficulties such as job loss, financial difficulty, or family turmoil. May the grace of our risen Lord Jesus give them—and all of us—his saving peace.

God bless you as you make evangelical, balanced, and thoughtful decisions about when—and how—to arrange for in-person worship. Together, God-willing, we will be back in God's house saying, "It is good, Lord, to be here!"

WELS Pension Plan contribution holiday in October 2020


The WELS Retirement Program Commission is pleased to announce a one-quarter contribution holiday for the WELS Pension Plan (the "Plan"). No Plan contributions will be due for the October-December 2020 quarter. Active workers will continue to earn Plan benefits for eligible service performed during the October-December 2020 quarter, and Plan benefits will continue to be paid to retired workers and surviving spouses.

In addition, the July 2020 quarterly Plan invoices will be generated and mailed in early June to support ministries in their efforts to make timely retirement contribution payments under the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

Mr. Joshua Peterman, director of WELS Benefit Plans, says, "During this uncertain time, we are pleased to provide relief to WELS ministries that will total approximately \$5 million in savings. In scheduling the contribution holiday for October 2020, the goal is to provide relief as soon as possible while allowing ministries to realize the full benefits of any loans received under the PPP. In addition, we are thankful to the Lord for blessing us with the financial flexibility to pass on these savings while maintaining the Plan's long-term viability."

The Pension contribution holiday announcements follows the announcement of a VEBA premium holiday for August 2020. WELS Benefits Plans understands the burden some WELS churches, schools, and

organizations may be facing and is grateful for the opportunity to provide relief. WELS ministries will receive additional reminders of the contribution holiday in the coming months.

If you have questions, contact the Benefit Plans Office at bpo@wels.net; 414-256-3299. 

New mission online event Serving those who serve their country

One of the many groups served by WELS Commission on Special Ministries is military service members and their families. One way the commission does this is through military contact pastors—pastors who serve WELS members and other Christians stationed at nearby military bases in addition to serving a congregation.

Rev. Paul Schulz, pastor at Risen Savior, Chula Vista, Calif., is one of approximately 120 military contact pastors who serve U.S. military members with the reassuring gospel message. He is the contact pastor for five different Marine and Naval bases in the area.

Schulz has been at Chula Vista for five and a half years. "I knew the congregation was made up of a lot of military members, and I always had a high respect for people who serve our country in that way," says Schulz. "It was a real appeal to me to be able to serve military families."

Schulz says one of the first challenges he faced was getting on base. "We want to let the chaplains on base know who we are and that if they come

across any WELS members they can send them our way so we can serve them," he says. "It's really, really hard to get on base. It's a challenge unless you have the right contact person."


Now Schulz leads a service every Sunday at the Marine Corp Recruit Depot in nearby San Diego; anywhere from 25 to 65 recruits attend, many of whom aren't WELS members. They're young, and it's usually their first time away from home. For the first time, they're taking ownership of their faith. "It's been one of the most incredible experiences and blessings in my ministry to be able to bring the Word to those recruits," says Schulz. "The spiritual needs are the same for all of us, whether it was the farmers and ranchers I served in South Dakota, the engineers in Peoria, Ill., or the military members here. We're all sinners who need to be reminded of our Savior and take comfort in his promises."

Military families, however, are faced with their own set of unique and challenging circumstances. "Each family may be going through this for the first time, and they desperately need the comfort and assurance of God's Word," Schulz says. "They're torn apart in so many different ways. It's a blessing to assure them, especially those who will be deployed, that the Lord is with them in all things and in all ways."

Schulz stresses that for him to be able to share God's comforting Word with WELS members stationed in his area, he needs to know about them. WELS Military Services has an online referral form, wels.net/refer, that

service members or their families can fill out. WELS contact pastors use the information to contact military members stationed across the country.

A new video is available from WELS Military Services titled "Staying Close to God's Word While in the Military" for WELS high school juniors and seniors who are planning on going into the military after graduation and for others who want to support their spiritual welfare such as their parents and pastors.

Find additional resources for military contact pastors at welscongregationalervices.net. 

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