

Commission on Discipleship

Our calling

“But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

(Luther’s explanation to the 3rd Article)

God has called us to be his own and to live under him in his kingdom. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). With God, the Christian life has purpose though a disinterested world and our sluggish flesh work to weaken our daily following of Christ.

Our WELS Commission on Discipleship exists to assist congregations, called workers, and individuals with gospel-centered resources, encouragement, and training to strengthen and connect every stage of life to the grace of God in Christ.

A look back

For the better part of the past decade, WELS Adult Discipleship and Youth & Family Ministry have lacked synod directors. The blessing is that it led to more grass-roots activity. The results are evident: continuation of biennial international youth rallies, Interactive Faith Bible studies, WELS Women’s Ministry, marriage enrichment, “TRANSFORMED” teen resources, *Kids Connection*, etc. Many thanks to hardworking commission chairmen, members, district coordinators, and their teams who continued to encourage and equip the faith of believers and congregations.

Our current situation

In 2017, the Conference of Presidents began to call for a director of discipleship. Pastor Donn Dobberstein accepted the call and assumed the position toward the end of the year. In early 2018, the Conference of Presidents approved the consolidation of two commissions (Adult Discipleship and Youth & Family Ministry) into one commission with a single mission:

“Our WELS Commission on Discipleship provides resources, encouragement, and training to assist congregations as they seek to strengthen individuals and families in their connection to Christ and their ongoing walk of faith.”

As this new commission is formed, the members will work together with district coordinators to learn, prioritize, and develop a cohesive plan and strategy incorporating resources and training for small-group Bible studies, apologetics, men and women's ministry, congregational youth ministry, college-age and young adults, parents and family life, Sunday School, and marriage ministry.

At the present

- **2018 International Youth Rally**

The youth rally exists to provide youth and youth leaders from across the synod a large-scale worship, education, fellowship, recreation, and service opportunity that deepens commitment to Christ and his church.

Online registration began April 1 for this summer's rally hosted by Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. Keynote presentations will focus on the rally theme, "Never Alone" (Matthew 28:20). Printed registration booklets were mailed to churches and contact youth leaders and are also available online at www.wels.net/2018youthrally.

- ***Kids Connection* video**

Planning is in process for the 24th season of this children's video with monthly episodes. In the present 2017-18 school year, 291 of 1,281 congregations connect kids to *Kids Connection* with the majority being churches with a Lutheran elementary school.

To broaden awareness of this excellent monthly children's resource, the Commission on Discipleship is discussing "bundling" it with its parent video, *WELS Connection*, as well as encouraging congregations to use it as a monthly supplement for their Sunday school or youth programs.

- **WELS Women's Ministry /Men's Ministry**

A fourth edition of "Heirs Together" was completed and is available from Northwestern Publishing House. The eight-lesson study encourages and equips women to use their gifts for God's glory and for God's kingdom. Highly successful the past year were Bible studies on Facebook that gathered almost a thousand women, many of whom may not have been able to meet otherwise due to distance or schedules (women may join at [facebook.com/groups/WMStudyGSLCR](https://www.facebook.com/groups/WMStudyGSLCR)). Planning has begun for a 2019 Women's Ministry Conference that brings and builds Christian women together in Christ, offers mutual support, and looks for ways that women can be of greater service within their congregations.

Regional mens' retreats and workshops are conducted under various local names. The Commission on Discipleship is interested in raising a higher awareness of mens' ministry events and resources throughout the districts of our synod.

- **Marriage Enrichment Weekends 2018-19**

Below is the following schedule of upcoming marriage enrichment weekends being promoted and hosted throughout the synod:

NE District	Oct. 5-7	Breckenridge, CO
PNW District	Nov. 16-18	Hood River, OR
MN District	Jan. 11-13	Chaska, MN
SA District	Jan. 25-27	Chattanooga, TN
AZ-CA District	Feb. 9-11	Napa Valley, CA
Canada	March (<i>tbd</i>)	Toronto, Ontario
PNW	April (<i>tbd</i>)	Anchorage, AK

A look ahead

As part of Congregational Services' five-year plan to prioritize the goals of "*opening the front door*" (adding new members through outreach) and "*shutting the back door*" (preventing members from leaving their congregation and synod), the Commission on Discipleship is working to provide a quality repository of resources via an online Congregational Services Resource Center.

Modules being developed:

- **"Key Mission & Ministry Challenges in the Church"** (study resources for personal, congregational, called workers, & future leaders).
- **Stewardship**
- **"Growth Group" Resources**
 - a. Organizational models to utilize groups for study, social, or service opportunities
 - b. Spiritual focus ideas
 - c. Recruiting & training
- **"Interactive Faith" Bible studies** (*videos & study guides on Elijah, Jonah, Joseph, Judges, "Our Calling", and "I Would Like to Read My Bible, BUT ..."*)

District presidents and discipleship coordinators have identified important areas of ongoing, future ministry challenges many of their congregations are facing for any number of reasons. For example:

- **ASSIMILATION** (not just of "new" members, but the integration of transfers, longtime members, or those who just aren't "connected" with their fellow church body members)
- **BIBLE CLASS ATTENDANCE** (Approximately 10% of a congregation's communicant membership attend worship and some sort of spiritual growth activity within their church. What is a congregation's ministry plan for spiritual growth to gain traction with the other 90%? What resources and ideas can be shared to encourage more participation?)
- **YOUTH** (According to the 2017 WELS statistical report, there was a 10% decline in Sunday School attendance this past year. Why? Is it time to relook or rethink the philosophy of the traditional Sunday School? What does youth ministry look like when you only have a couple kids? What's a youth ministry look like that focuses less on attendance and more on spiritual growth? How do we lead our children to

take ownership of their faith? What can we do to better bridge the 0-18 year old age group into the 18-25 year old age group knowing there is a sharp drop-off between the two? How better can kids connect with their parents and with their church in faith development and ministry service?)

- **PARENTS** (what resources do parents need to equip and encourage them to be Christian parents?)
- **APOLOGETICS RESOURCES** (interestingly, all age groups want them: middle school, high school, college, young adults, parents)
- **BIBLE INFORMATION CLASS & CATECHISM Resource-Sharing** (identify ministry brothers with good models, practices, and materials).

The Commission on Discipleship's goal is to engage all circuits and their congregations into having an intentional conversation on their discipleship ministry and what it looks like in each of their unique ministry settings. We are confident that God will bless the time and effort spent together with blessing an annual strategic discipleship plan that takes discipleship discussion and moves it into actual activity.

Rev. Donn Dobberstein, *director*

Rev. John Boggs, *chairman*

Rev. Gary Pufahl, *vice-chairman*