

## Floor Committee 13: Support Services

### **Subject: Overview**

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, p. 73-79

Report No. 01

Support Services encompasses Technology, Financial Services, Human Resources, and Facility Services.

### **Technology**

The focus of WELS Technology over the past two years has been on the following:

*Digital Security:* A key priority of WELS Technology is to comply with increasingly more rigorous cyber security industry standards. Every synod data source (spreadsheets, databases, contact lists, etc.) in which personally identifiable information may be contained is assigned appropriate security measures. Additionally, a complete Mobile Device Management program ensures that any device that has access to synod resources can be monitored, and, if necessary, locked or erased if stolen.

*Applications/forms development:* WELSource, a web-based database application, has increased operational efficiency using secure digital tools. Forms which provide information about called workers for call lists, church/school statistics, mission activity reporting, CMO commitments, etc., are accessed through the main portal called My WELS Cloud. Making over 40 common forms available digitally has saved staff countless hours and has resulted in greater participation across the synod. Several key applications (apps) have been developed to save time. The Call System app serves the Conference of Presidents and Lutheran Schools by pulling together candidates for call lists. The synod's financial management and donor management systems are now cloud-based, an approach that is more cost effective, accessible, and secure. The increase in digital forms has been accompanied by a parallel increase in the need for help desk support provided by WELS Technology.

*Digital Ministry Resources:* The WELS Mobile App has a new, more efficient format that allows more people to access content on a wide range of devices. We encourage all WELS members to have the WELS app appear on the home screen of their smart phone. Devotional content is also now available through smart speakers (Echo and Alexa). The WELS Yearbook is available online and has been combined with the WELS Locator. WELSTech, a weekly audio/video podcast featuring resources that congregations and schools can use to improve their ministries,

celebrated its 600th show this spring. Furthermore, numerous workshops and presentations are available via WELS Technology.

As God allows new technologies to be used, the WELS Technology team remains steadfastly committed to sharing the gospel, improving efficiencies, and serving called workers, congregations, and schools of the WELS. Soon, WELS technology will be retiring the old database (Progress), continuing digitization of paper forms, and integrating infrastructure improvements to enhance security and reliability. These efforts will save thousands of hours of labor each year, which will benefit called workers, churches, and schools. Call lists will be more accurate, reports timelier, and access to the correct forms and individuals more likely accomplished without assistance.

### **Financial Services**

Financial services facilitate WELS ministries by providing 23 God-pleasing, efficient, and effective financial services consistent with industry-standard accounting practices. These services include: financial planning and forecasts; accounting, audit, and financial statement preparation; gift processing; accounts payable and receivable; unclaimed property; special funds accounting; payroll; risk management; insurance; records retention; banking; cash management; investments; contract review; corporate credit card and rental vehicle programs; trust administration; tax advisory services; and legal services coordination. The services are provided to a variety of WELS entities (WELS, WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Fund, WELS Retirement Plan, WELS Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association [WELS-VEBA], Northwestern Publishing House, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College, Luther Preparatory School, and Michigan Lutheran Seminary).

The 11 staff members of Financial Services are well-trained with appropriate education and work experience. They are to be commended for: 1) financial statements receiving the best possible opinion (unmodified) from external auditors, 2) reviewing and revising WELS policies prior to submission to the Synodical Council, 3) implementing new accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations, 4) guiding the development of the 2019-21 ministry financial plan, 5) working with WELS Technology to implement software that will increase efficiency and effectiveness, 6) working with the Capital Projects Committee and Synodical Council to clarify

requirements for capital projects, and 7) collaborating with WELS Foundation for the selection of a gift administration provider (RenPSG).

Even though there are significantly fewer staff than several years ago, the staff remains confident that the work can be done as they strive to improve effectiveness and reduce costs within their area and across WELS. They are to be commended for their dedication to ensuring that the services will not deteriorate because of the recent staff reduction. Future plans include: 1) implementing new cloud-based donor relationship management and accounting software, 2) collaborating with ministerial education schools on investigation of paperless accounts payable alternatives, 3) implementation of new accounting standards related to leases, revenue recognition, and contributions, 4) review and revision of corporate WELS policies, and 5) cross-training of Financial Services employees to ensure continuity during vacancies and extended absences.

### **Human Resources**

Human Resources (HR) oversees the personnel functions for WELS entities. It also serves as a resource to WELS congregations and to affiliated groups and entities regarding risk management and federal and state legal requirements related to personnel matters. Noteworthy is that the strong relationship with the Benefit Plans Office (BPO) allows for an efficient and productive HR office.

Adequately staffed by two very experienced full-time employees, HR provides a high level of support to WELS entities by managing day-to-day activities along with a few key initiatives: 1) staffing key lay worker positions, 2) working with the Synodical Council to review the WELS Called Worker Compensation Guidelines, 3) making available a resource for calling bodies known as The Called Worker Compensation Calculator, 4) reporting Affordable Care Act compliance requirements, 5) vetting synod board/committee nominees, 6) facilitating the process of securing Religious Worker Visas, and 7) working with congregations and the Conference of Presidents on matters related to risk and personnel as well as general compensation, benefits, and policy issues. Of note is the necessity of WELS congregations and affiliated groups to report any charge, report, or allegation of sexual misconduct or physical abuse involving pastors, teachers, vicars, full or part-time employees or volunteers in any capacity not only to authorities, but also to the district president, director of Lutheran Schools or director of Human Resources.

Looking ahead, HR will be evaluating where efficiencies could be implemented while maintaining effectiveness. This includes the following: 1) facilitating programs for the management and staff of WELS entities, 2) updating wels.net with practical HR information, 3) performing due diligence with HR vendors and systems, 4) coordinating timely information support for areas or ministry and WELS schools, 5) training WELS leaders to develop supervisory skills, 6) reviewing HR policies, procedures and compensation programs at WELS operated organizations, and provide support to WELS organizations in areas related to human resources.

### **Facility Services**

Staffed primarily by the WELS Chief Financial Officer, Facility Services supports the ministries conducted at or through WELS corporate headquarters by providing a God-pleasing physical workspace conducive to ministry operation and by creating a welcoming environment to all who enter the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry (CMM) in Waukesha, WI. During 2018, the remaining synod archives from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were moved to the synod archival space established in the CMM in 2016. In May 2019, the restructured operations of Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) were also moved into the building. The Building Fund policy ensures adequate funding to maintain and improve the CMM. It directs that a portion of the rent paid by WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Foundation, WELS Investment Funds, NPH, and WELS Benefits Plan be directed to the Building Fund. The balance in the Building Fund is approximately \$350,000. In the next five to seven years it is anticipated that the parking lot and HVAC may need to be replaced.

Teacher Keith Bowe, chairman

Teacher Tim Biesterfeld, secretary