

Floor Committee #14: Support Services

Subject: Overview

Reference: *Book of Reports and Memorials*, pp. 67-74

Report No. 01

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

Technology

WELS Technology has focused on infrastructure, data, security, and resource availability over the past two years.

Infrastructure: WELS Technology uses Microsoft technologies for many of its needs. Microsoft Teams and transitioning to cloud-based servers allowed staff to continue working during the COVID-19 “safer at home” governmental order. There are now “Team Rooms” and a “Zoom Room” at the Center for Mission and Ministry. Another notable change is equipping employees with laptop computers, moving away from desktop models.

Data: Most of the synod data is housed by WELSource. The former platform, Progress, was retired in 2020. WELSource is used for congregational and school statistical reporting, called worker data maintenance, pension plan administration, teacher evaluations and assessments, and much more.

Security: The synod maintains sensitive information about called workers and institutions. The synod-owned databases have never been compromised. The security firm FRSecure has been contracted to conduct a security review, and while security mitigation measures have begun, they may not be completed for multiple years. A security analyst is being hired to help coordinate and conduct regular security audits for each WELS entity. The committee commends these steps and encourages WELS technology to continue its work to protect sensitive information and to communicate to the Synodical Council regularly.

Resource availability: Connecting people with digital resources is an important part of the scope of WELS Technology. Many different websites and applications have been updated and made available, one of the most noteworthy being the WELS Retirement Program Comparison Calculator.

Security improvement is a major challenge and focus in the coming years. Additional resources are needed at the four synodical schools and Northwestern Publishing House to help combat the increasingly intense and frequent cyber threats. WELS Technology continues to coordinate with other areas of ministry and mission fields to support ministry initiatives and equip them with the necessary digital tools.

Financial Services

Financial Services recently went through a significant transition as Mr. Kyle Egan became the new WELS chief financial officer (CFO). Mr. Todd Poppe had served for 16 years and retired in 2020. Other notable happenings of the past year include obtaining a \$2.7 million PPP loan, communicating female called worker eligibility for parsonage allowance, and monitoring the support forecast and financial plan during challenging economic times.

A list of upcoming initiatives include: completing a request for proposal process for the synod’s banking services, researching alternatives to the general ledger system to improve efficiency, and researching and implementing new accounting standards.

Human Resources

Currently, the WELS Human Resources staff of two has been working on the following initiatives: 1) staffing ten lay worker positions, 2) providing guidance through the pandemic, 3) providing guidance regarding the updated IRS code interpretation, which allows female called workers to utilize the

parsonage allowance, 4) working with congregations and WELS district presidents on personnel matters and policy issues, 5) providing guidance for Affordable Care Act (ACA) compliance, 6) assisting in filling board/committee openings for positions appointed by the Synodical Council, and 7) helping secure religious worker visas.

Looking ahead, future initiatives include: 1) work to facilitate a safe return for full staff and visitors to the Center for Mission and Ministry, 2) perform due diligence on the vendors and systems in place within the HR structure, 3) work with our areas of ministry and synodical schools in coordinating timely information and support for our workers, 4) facilitate learning and development programs for the management and staff of the synod entities, 5) provide continued training for synod leaders, 6) review and evaluate HR policies and procedures, and 7) continue providing support to WELS in HR matters.

Facility Services

Overall the Center for Mission and Ministry grounds are in good condition. The lower level accommodates the synod archives, the WELS visitor center, and Northwestern Publishing House.

A Building Fund Policy has been created to ensure funds exist for maintenance and improvements. Currently the fund has nearly \$400,000. The parking lot and HVAC system may need to be replaced in the next three to five years. The replacement of the parking lot has been included within the ministry financial plan for a fiscal year 2023 project funded through the Building Fund.

Teacher Benjamin Schramm, chairman
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