

TOGETHER

July 19, 2011

He says the youth rally is an opportunity to encourage one another. “They [the students] get the reminder that they are part of the body of Christ. This is one of the largest organizational events in our church body,” says Warnecke.

This will be the first youth rally held in the new every-three-years rotation. Previously, the youth rallies were held every other year.

Registration will open early 2012. Congregations will be mailed information in November this year. Information will also be available at www.wels.net/events or check out “WELS International Youth Rally” on Facebook.

Koehler called as MLS president

On July 12, the Michigan Lutheran Seminary Governing Board called Rev. Ronald Koehler from Grace, Tucson, Ariz., to serve as president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), one of two preparatory schools operated by the synod.

A 1991 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Koehler originally served at Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie du Chien, Wis. He began his ministry to Grace, Tucson, in 1993.

Koehler is also a 1983 graduate of Michigan Lutheran Seminary. He says that his MLS professors, coaches, and band director really made an impact on him, not just in the areas that they taught, but also with their obvious Christian faith. In addition, Koehler credits his friends at MLS for encouraging him to study for the ministry. “For these reasons,” he says, “when I think of MLS, I think of the ‘MLS family’ so often talked about. There is something special about that precious and enduring bond of Christian faith and family formed at Michigan Lutheran Seminary.”

Koehler considers it an honor to be asked to serve as MLS president. As he prayerfully considers this call, he will seek the input and advice of men who have held this position or a similar one, as well as input from the members of Grace, so that he can consider the needs of his current congregation, along with the needs of MLS.

Rev. Daniel Sims from Zion, Columbus, Wis., returned the call as MLS president at the end of June. The position has been vacant since Sept. 17, 2010, when Rev. Aaron Frey resigned the position. Dr. William Zeiger, vice president of MLS, is serving as president during the vacancy.

The WELS view: By Scripture alone

Recent news reports have thrust the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) into the middle of a presidential campaign. What has catapulted this relatively small Lutheran church body into the media spotlight is the fact that, until recently, presidential candidate Michele Bachmann had held membership in a WELS congregation.

As often happens in controversies both religious and political, people tend to view issues through the prism of their individual perspectives and beliefs. That often results in obscured facts and distortions of the truth. The discussion of the WELS position on the Antichrist is a perfect example of this.

With 390,000 members, WELS is the third largest of the Lutheran churches in the United States. It is often described, properly so, as the “most theologically conservative” of the three.

WELS does hold to the historic Lutheran position that the Roman Catholic papacy fits the biblical characteristics of the Antichrist. We do this without reservation and with no apologies. We believe that our doctrines cannot be tempered by political correctness or modi-

fied to align them with changing culture or public opinion.

WELS draws all of its teachings from the Bible. “By Scripture alone” was one of the major themes of the Lutheran Reformation, and WELS has not retreated from that core belief. WELS is also a “confessional” Lutheran church, which means that we hold to the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions because they are a clear and accurate articulation of biblical truth. These confessional writings, produced at the time of the Reformation and in the decades that followed, identified the fundamental ways in which the Roman Catholic Church had departed from the teachings of the Bible. Even though Martin Luther had sought only to reform his church and return it to the correct teachings of Scripture, he was excommunicated by Rome and targeted for death because of his beliefs. The birth of the Lutheran church was not Luther’s preference; it was made necessary by the decisions of the Roman Catholic Church itself.

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions identified the Roman Catholic papacy as the Antichrist for three main reasons: First, the papacy claimed to speak with an



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authority—even infallibility—that was equal to or surpassing the Word of God itself. By doing so, it put itself in a position of being “anti” or “in place of” Christ. Second, the papacy claimed that there is no salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church, making membership in a human organization a condition for salvation; finally, in emphasizing that faith and obedience are necessary for salvation, the papacy undermined the very heart and center of the biblical teaching that salvation is by God’s grace alone and comes to individuals through faith in Christ alone. In holding to each of these teachings, the Roman Catholic papacy placed itself in clear opposition to the foundation of the Christian faith, and therefore in opposition to Christ himself.

Although the Roman Catholic Church may have softened the way in which it refers to these doctrines, it has never repudiated or corrected them.

While WELS continues to see the characteristics of the Antichrist in the Roman Catholic papacy, it is wrong and dishonest to portray this belief as stemming from anti-Catholic bigotry. We do have strong convictions, and we identify what we believe are teachings that depart from the Word of God. But we hold no animosity toward Christians who hold the Roman Catholic faith, and we respect the right of people to hold beliefs different from ours even as we point out the error. Furthermore,

we rejoice that even in the Roman Catholic Church, where we believe that the gospel has been distorted, there are many Catholics who hold to a simple faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and who will ultimately be saved. Testifying to the errors that still exist in Catholic doctrine is itself an expression of love; remaining silent or glossing over doctrinal differences would express the opposite.

Media reports have portrayed the WELS position on the Antichrist to be a prominent or even signature doctrine in our church. Certainly we do not deny this teaching or attempt to hide it. At the same time, it is not a topic of daily discussion or a regular theme in Sunday sermons. Nor is this a view peculiar to WELS; it has been the historic position of the Lutheran church for almost 500 years—a position still held by confessional Lutheran church bodies around the world.

Michele Bachmann is no longer a member of our church, and we are not in any position to comment on her current religious views. But we can say that her previous membership in our church does not make her guilty of being an “anti-Catholic bigot.” To accuse her—or her former church—of that is patently unfair and wrong.

Serving in Christ,

Mark Schroeder

TOP NEWS STORIES

Synod convention begins July 25

About 400 pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and laymen will gather next week at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., for the WELS 61st Biennial Convention, to be held July 25-29.

The synod in convention will be meeting under the theme “Christ’s Love, Our Calling,” the phrase chosen to describe our church body two years ago. “I pray that God will enable these delegates to see something that I see every day,” says Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS president, “that he’s brought us together as a family of believers who have just incredible opportunities in front of us to share the gospel of Jesus with the world.”

At the convention delegates will be discussing the following:

- The proposed ministry plan (budget) for the next two years.
- A proposed long-range plan that shows where WELS wants to be as a synod by the year 2017.
- A report from the Conference of Presidents on the termination of divine calls for financial reasons.
- A progress report from the Translation Evaluation Committee, which is leading an evaluation of the revision of the New International Version of the Bible as well as other translations.

They also will be electing a synod president, second vice president, and men for 16 other positions on various synodical boards and commissions.

WELS members can watch the convention live online at www.wels.net/convention. Each day a special convention issue of “Together” will be sent to all subscribers, which will summarize the convention’s actions that day. This special issue will include a video wrap-up of the day’s events, along with articles and photos. A complete summary of the week, along with explanations of how the delegates’ decisions will affect WELS’ ministry, will be presented in “Together” the week following convention.

Dates set for next WELS youth rally

Plans are underway for the WELS 2012 International Youth Rally, to be held June 27-30 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The theme for the rally is “Fill Up!” based on John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Rev. Richard Warnecke, a member of the Commission on Youth & Family Ministry, says, “I think sometimes high school students kind of feel that no one cares about them. There’s so few high school students in the church. This is a reminder that they’re part of the church.”