

WELSMEN LTD

and

WELSMEN CHARITIES LTD

by

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## THE WELSMEN LIMITED

Often times, when a preacher wants to emphasize the importance of regular worship for his parishioners, he will quote the familiar Bible verse, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." (He 10:25) We are never to give up the privilege we have and the blessings bestowed upon us by regular worship together as a group. Corporate worship is not to be forsaken. There is a group in the Milwaukee area which also takes into account the words of the Apostle, by not forsaking the fellowship we have as believers, and enjoying the fellowship in the form of gathering together. That group is known as the Welsmen Limited. It will be of great benefit to trace the history of this organization, to see that its main directive is gather and enjoy fellowship.

### I. THE ORIGIN OF THE WELSMEN

Existing in the Milwaukee area, is a federation of about 55-60 congregations known as the Milwaukee Federation of Churches. The Federation exists to support the area Wisconsin Lutheran High School. The Federation is also known for its sponsorship of Reformation Festival. Other activities which the Federation engages in are a day care center for mentally

retarded children, the operation of bargain centers, and sponsorship of the radio broadcast "Message from the Master." It was from this group that a proposal was made to establish a Milwaukee wide men's club. A member of the board named Harold Buelow was asked to serve as the catalyst for the proposed men's group. Monroe Mund, Dr. Charles Kuphall and Dr. Harry Grossert were three men who assisted Mr. Buelow in his efforts to form the group. Pastor Alfred Walther served as the spiritual advisor for the group. At Divinity-Divine Charity the men met in November of 1975 to discuss the feasibility of such a group. There was a unanimous opinion among the group to organize. (2)

The first meeting of the Welsmen was held at St. John's in Wauwatosa in March of 1976. 18 men attended. It was at this meeting that it was decided that the Welsmen should meet at a restaurant each month for fellowship, and that a constitution should be drawn up. The first dinner was held on the second Tuesday of April in 1976. 23 men attended. On July 13th of 1976, the constitution was adopted along with the name Welsmen Ltd. and Welsmen Charities Ltd. The group is registered as an

incorporation with the State of Wisconsin.

## II. The Purpose of the Welsmen

The primary purpose of the Welsmen is fellowship. To get together and enjoy the company of fellow Christians is the primary purpose for the existence of the organization. The group has as its secondary purpose the support of charities. 25% of the dues are used to support WELS charities. Every Area Lutheran High School in the WELS has received donations from the Welsmen. The support offered is usually in response to requests presented to the organization. One of the most recent benefactors of the Welsmen Charities Ltd. is the Special Ministries Board of the WELS. Along with a donation of 25% of their dues, the Welsmen also support an annual request drive.

## III. Who belongs to the Welsmen?

The members of the Welsmen are mainly from the immediate Milwaukee area. That is only natural remembering that the Welsmen are an outgrowth of the Federation. There are members

who travel from Racine and from Plymouth. The members from farther out have moved from the Milwaukee area, but desire to retain their membership in the group. The Welsmen have one ELS member. The members of the Welsmen are mainly businessmen, from a cross section of society. The minimum age for membership is 30, and the oldest member is 90. There are no Pastors in the Welsmen.

Recently, there have been inquiries from other parts of the state and country as to the makeup of the Welsmen. Through one of it's members, Allen Heckendorf, a group of WELS members from Appleton have been in contact with the Welsmen, discussing the possibility of a chapter of the Welsmen in Appleton. Also groups from Michigan, Texas, and the Twin Cities have made inquiries. The President of the Welsmen sees greatest potential for expansion in the Twin Cities due to its large population of WELS members.

#### IV. How do you become a Welsmen Member?

The President of the Welsmen states that they desire to

have people who want to join, join. The Welsmen do not spend a lot of money or time on advertising their group. Their existence is passed on by word of mouth. If someone desires to become a member, he must be brought to a meeting by a sponsor Welsmen. If someone desires to become a member and makes his desire known, a reference check is made with the prospect's pastor. The Welsmen desire to have members who are dedicated laymen in their group. The President of the Welsmen described his group "Not as a service organization, but an organization of men dedicated to the Lord's service."

At it's beginning, the clergy were perhaps a little leery of a lay run organization of men who desired to be active for their Lord operating in their own back yard. It took a couple of years for the organization to earn the trust and respect of the Milwaukee area clergy. One of the annual functions which helped to overcome the stigmas is the Pastor's night, held every second Tuesday in May. The night is an anticipated event for the clergy of Milwaukee, a night on which the pastors and professors of the area can enjoy one another's fellowship. The evening has grown in popularity to having an attendance of close

to 400. It prompted a Seminary professor to remark that the attendance that night was like manure. Manure spread thinly over a large area does a lot of good, but put together in one place only stinks.

#### V. A Typical Meeting of the Welsmen.

The Welsmen meet once a month, on the second Tuesday of each month. Among his other duties, it is the job of the first vice-president to find a meeting place. The meeting place is usually a restaurant. Meetings begin at 5:30, with cocktail hour, and supper at 6:30. One of the things that the President of the organization stated was that if there is any business to be taken care of, he tries to do that as quickly and efficiently as possible. With the majority of the members being businessmen, and doing business all day, the idea is to get away from business and not strap themselves down with a long drawn out meeting. They gather to enjoy fellowship. If there is to be entertainment for the evening, it is the job of the third vice-president to find the entertainment. The meetings usually adjourn by 9:00 pm.

## VI. What are the goals of the Welsmen?

The Welsmen are not out to conquer the world. With the recent inquiries as to structure and possibility for expansion, the Welsmen are looking into having chapters of their organization. The President of the organization feels they will need to have a common bond to tie them together if the organization branches out, because the main purpose of the organization, namely fellowship, will be physically impossible. He feels that mere outward structure such as a constitution will not be enough. He ponders the idea of Television as the link which perhaps might bind a nation wide organization together. The concept of fellowship would be retained if the chapters could meet at a national convention. All of this is mere speculation at this point in time for the Welsmen and their appointed leaders.

## VII. Conclusion

The Wisconsin Synod has a college dedicated itself to equip the laity of the Synod for ministry. The Synod itself has adopted a Spiritual Renewal program to invigorate the spiritual



life of its people. In the midst of the heart of the Wisconsin Synod exists a group which is self generating, a group which does wonderful things for charities in our Synod, a group which is lay led and made up of solely lay members, a group which does not forsake the gathering of itself together. The President of the Welsmen stated many of the members are so active in their home congregations that they really look forward to an evening out in which they can just enjoy one another's company. More power to you Welsmen.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The main body of information came from the president of the Welsmen, Paul L. Wangsness.

The background of historical information came from a short history printed on the first page of the handbook for the Welsmen.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library vertical files contain a file on the Milwaukee Federation, a file which was used for background information.

Various members of the Welsmen were used as sources, along with Seminary faculty through their contact with the Welsmen on Pastor's night.