

**WELS Committee on Relief in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Interview of Pastor Philip Schupmann,  
Chairman of the WELS Committee on Relief*

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Church History  
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### *What I've Learned*

When I started out on this project I didn't know where to begin. I knew that my dad, Pastor Philip Schupmann, was the chairman and I thought for sure that he would have plenty of minutes or documentation talking about what he spends so much of his time doing. I was wrong. That's because 90% of what the WELS Committee on Relief does is write out checks. Sure there's more to the big picture of what they do but the only way to find out is by interviewing its members. That is why I chose to interview its chairman, Pastor Philip Schupmann.

The WELS Committee on Relief has been around since 1946 and has scriptural support for functioning. They use Galatians 6:10 as their guide for operating. Originally the WELS Committee on Relief's main focus was on helping out "war sufferers" from World War II. In 1957 their scope was broadened to general relief at the synod convention.

Since the synod convention in 1957 the Committee for the most part was run by a few individuals from the Michigan District. This trend continued until 1990 when Pastor Schupmann from Illinois got on the scene. Since he joined the committee they have also included other individuals from multiple states including Texas and Wisconsin.

The Committee on Relief is very efficient with its dollars especially when it comes to administrative costs. Most of their meetings are done over the phone or via email. They only meet on average one time a year face to face. The history of their spending has always been focused on helping others.

Before 9/11, one might say the Committee on Relief was just another committee of the WELS. It received about \$300,000 a year depending on the need for that year. Most people in the WELS probably didn't even know that they existed unless they themselves had lived through a natural disaster. When 9/11 happened the hearts of the American people cried out with love. They donated the largest amount of money the Committee on Relief has ever seen. The total amount donated was over one million dollars. From this point on in history the Committee on Relief has functioned differently. They created a disaster team so that they could better survey the land, the people, and the destruction that had been caused by the latest natural disaster. This large amount of money also brought about greater responsibility. The WELS people trusted the WELS Committee on Relief to help in ways they could not.

The other main disaster that really put the WELS Committee on Relief on the map was Hurricane Katrina. Again this disaster took place on US soil but instead on affecting a few thousand people it affected millions. This disaster brought in more money for relief than even did 9/11.

When it comes to helping people or nations outside of the US the WELS Committee on Relief can still get the job done effectively. They will use WELS missionaries to survey the area if they are in the region otherwise they will call upon non-religious, non-profit based organizations such as CARE. This was the case when the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 took place. The WELS Committee on Relief gave money to the CARE organization because they could make our dollars go farther and be more effective faster. Because of relief committee's such as CARE, the WELS people can touch the lives of almost anyone in the world.

Helping people in the US is a little bit more intense as far as the WELS Committee on Relief is concerned. In situations such as Hurricane Katrina the committee was a little bit more hands on. However they were still primarily the ones just writing out the checks. That is because they usually pair up with other WELS agencies such as WELS Kingdom Workers or Builders for Christ. These are the committees that handle more of the volunteer work. The WELS Committee on Relief frequently tag teams with these agencies because there is no way that they could effectively get the job done on their own. Pastor Schupmann also stressed the point that people don't just look for money in dire situations but they look for people that are willing to help volunteer their time to make that money more effective. In cases like Hurricane Katrina the WELS has done a great job working with one another to the glory of God.

The WELS Committee on Relief doesn't just help people or nations out in time of natural disasters but they are also willing to help out certain individuals with certain situations. For instance the committee will help out people whom the District Presidents of the WELS have deemed fit to help. "There is a process" Pastor Schupmann stressed, but that process isn't meant to intimidate people from coming forward with their problems but it is in place so that people exhaust every other possibility first, such as government aid. By following procedures such as this the Committee on Relief can save their dollars for individuals that have no other way to turn.

Over the years the WELS Committee on Relief has approximately received 25 million dollars since its existence in 1946. In recent years they have been blessed with substantial donations from various people and organizations totaling over 2.2 million

dollars in one year. Because of the popularity of the WELS Committee on Relief in the WELS and the it's people love for mankind Pastor Schupmann thought that the committee would eventually have to get more staff and would have to fund a full time chairman. This is mostly because of the amount of responsibility that the Lord has the blessed them with.

Over all I learned quite a bit from this project. I learned that the WELS Committee on Relief is truly a blessing from God because it operates and exists squarely off of funds donated by people who have a love for their savior. The WELS Committee on Relief is not just a household name these days but instead it is a living organization that provides a light for all people just like Galatians 6:10 states, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

### **Questions asked during the interview:**

The WELS Committee on Relief is the only official agency of the WELS that is dedicated to the work of Christian charity. How is it that the WELS Committee on Relief first got established?

In 1957 at the Synod convention the "Wisconsin Synod Committee on Relief for War Sufferers" changed its name to "WELS Committee on Relief" and its scope was broadened to general relief. Since that change the Committee has been involved in providing relief all over the world for various reasons. It's almost 60 years later since that convention reshaped the Committee on Relief. How has time changed or not changed the way the Committee functions?

9/11 and Hurricane Katrina have made relief organizations throughout the US common household names. In your opinion how have these major events on US soil affected or promoted the WELS Committee on Relief?

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction noted that almost 250,000 people died from natural disasters in 2004. From those 250,000 people almost 230,000 of them came from the Indian Ocean tsunami alone. It is also estimated that 50,000 Children were orphaned by this tsunami disaster.

When the WELS Committee on Relief sees so much pain and suffering on the other side of the world, like what happened from the Indian Ocean tsunami of 04, how does it make an effective contribution to that area of the world with the donations that are brought in especially when they have so much need?

Could you briefly talk about the WELS Committee on Relief's relationship with the CARE foundation? Why is it that we use them as apposed to say the Salvation Army charity?

Now bringing things a little closer to home I would like to talk to you about Hurricane Katrina and how the WELS Committee on Relief has been able to help. In 2005 the International Strategy for Disaster stated that there were 360 natural disasters, 157 million people affected by those disasters, 90,000 deaths, 159 billion dollars in damage, 125 billion dollars of which came from Hurricane Katrina.

First of all how do you know where to start? In other words what kind of a process do you take when something of this magnitude hits especially when it's so close to home?

How does a natural disaster on US soil, like Hurricane Katrina, make things tougher and easier when it comes to providing relief?

What other areas besides natural disaster does the Committee provide relief for?

When you provide relief for someone what is the chief concern?

Approximately how much money has been contributed to the Committee on Relief since its establishment?

Where do you see the WELS Committee on Relief 50 years from now?