

# Translation Feasibility Committee

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*Report to the Districts — May 17, 2012*

The 2011 Synod Convention (Resolution 19-02) authorized the appointment of a taskforce to study the feasibility of:

- 1. producing a confessional Lutheran translation**
- 2. and/or producing study Bible notes to accompany whatever Bible translation is chosen for synod publications**

The task force was to offer a preliminary report to the 2012 district conventions and final recommendations to the 2013 Convention of the WELS.

The WELS Translation Feasibility Committee (TFC) was appointed by President Schroeder and held its initial meeting in September of 2011. This preliminary report will share information gathered and provide an outline of the work yet to be done by the TFC.

## District Ballot Choice

The TFC recommends to the districts the translation ballot choice that enables another year of study. The complexity and importance of the issue warrant further time spent examining the issue.

## Feasibility of Producing a Confessional Lutheran Translation

After its initial period of study, the TFC concurs with the 2011 Synod Convention which recognized that production of a confessional Lutheran translation cannot be a short term solution for the issue of selecting a translation for WELS publications. We concur with their estimate that production of a confessional Lutheran translation would take ten to fifteen years (Resolution 19-02, *Proceedings 2011*). The TFC estimates that even the most minimal revision of a public domain text would take not less than five to seven years.

The TFC wants to underscore the enormity of the task that a translation/revision of the entire Bible would entail. Recent translation/revision projects can provide some perspective. The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* was a translation from the original languages. A large team of translators and editors took fifteen years to complete the translation at a cost of \$10 million. The *English Standard Version* was not an original translation, but a revision of an existing translation. Crossway used 100 translators and editors for ten years to complete the revision at a cost of \$2.5 million. Both publishers believe that costs to replicate the projects today would be significantly higher due to inflation. These figures are presented simply to give an idea of the cost of past projects. The process by which the TFC will attempt to provide more accurate estimates of the costs for the production of a confessional Lutheran translation project is outlined below.

## **Next Steps Toward Determining Feasibility**

The TFC intends to examine the project for a confessional Lutheran translation in terms of legal, technical, and economic feasibility. In order to evaluate each of those areas the committee plans to prepare for the 2013 Convention by defining **Product, Process, People, Price, and Impact** for the project.

### ***Product***

The feasibility of producing a confessional Lutheran translation hinges on the end product we hope to produce. We could certainly produce a revision of an existing translation using volunteer work from interested pastors. The committee is not confident, however, that it would result in a product that the synod desires. The TFC envisions that a project worth undertaking would be one that results in translation/revision of the highest quality that would be a gift to the Church and a unifying translation for our synod. Such a project would require significant investment of money and manpower with much of the leadership stemming from our language instructors at the ministerial education schools.

### ***Process***

What process would be required to produce that text? The TFC is working to answer that question by preparing proposed translation philosophies, rubrics, review committees, oversight and estimated timelines.

### ***People***

What kind of manpower would be needed to properly carry out the process? How many translation teams and review teams? How many full time positions will be required? How many of our language instructors will need to be involved and at what level? Beyond translators, what kind of English stylists or experts from other areas will need to be involved?

### ***Price***

With our end product in mind, and with the process and people clearly envisioned, the TFC hopes to estimate the price of the project in terms of both dollars and positions.

### ***Impact***

Finally, the TFC will try to quantify the impact such a project would have on our work together as a synod. For example, if the project would utilize three Hebrew professors at half time for ten years, how would that impact our ability to instruct the next generation of pastors in the biblical languages? If the project would cost millions of dollars, can we identify likely avenues of funding?

## **Feasibility of producing a WELS study Bible**

### **Status of current Lutheran Study Bibles**

WELS has not produced its own study Bible. The study Bible currently in wide use in WELS is the *Concordia Study Bible*, produced by Concordia Publishing House (CPH) using the NIV84 text. The Bible lists for \$54.99. This study Bible will no longer be sold as of April 2013. CPH is contractually bound by Zondervan to halt sales, so this product will not be available as a study Bible option for the WELS.

The other study Bible in use is the *Lutheran Study Bible*, produced by CPH using the ESV 2001 text. This Bible lists for \$54.99, and will be available for the foreseeable future.

### Translation Permissions and Royalties

The TFC is studying the feasibility of producing study Bible notes to accompany the translation chosen for synod publications. These notes, along with the chosen translation, would be printed by Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) as a WELS study Bible. At the request of the TFC, NPH approached the publishers of existing Bible translations to request permission and pricing for use of their texts in a WELS study Bible. Each publisher expressed a willingness to give NPH permission to use their translations. Their royalty fees are listed below:

Zondervan, New International Version (NIV)*	10%
Crossway, English Standard Version (ESV)	2%
Holman, Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)**	3-5%
A future confessional Lutheran translation	0%

*\*Note: Zondervan royalty fees are calculated differently than other publishers. They charge their royalty fee on the full retail price rather than the wholesale discount price. This would make it difficult for NPH to sell a WELS NIV study Bible at any discounted prices, such as a clergy discount, or at any discounted price to other Christian bookstores, such as the MLC and WLS campus bookstores.*

*\*\* The HCSB print editions currently come with a faith statement printed on the inside cover. The TEC contacted the publisher and was told that the current statement is being phased out. The publishers have assured the TEC that editions can be printed without any statement of faith.*

### Production Costs

The TFC asked NPH to provide a cost study of producing a WELS study Bible in print or digital format that would be comparable to the *Concordia Study Bible*. NPH reported that the majority of the costs in printing a study Bible involve the production of the notes, maps, layout and design work. The savings for an electronic only edition would be minimal.

NPH cost estimates were aided by the recent completion of similar projects at CPH and Crossway. Each of those publishers produced a study Bible to accompany the ESV text. The *Lutheran Study Bible* project cost \$1.5 million, and the *Crossway Study Bible* cost \$2.5 million. NPH has estimated that its costs for producing a WELS study Bible would be in a similar range (excluding the additional cost of inflation). However, given NPH's much smaller market, even with the most optimistic sales projections, in order for NPH to recover the costs of the project, NPH would have to price a WELS study Bible at over \$100 per book—about double the price of either the *Lutheran Study Bible* or the *Crossway Study Bible*.

NPH feels that a list cost that high would price the book out of the market. To bring the price per book down to what the other publishers charge for their study Bibles would require a subsidy for the project of at least \$1.4 million. Without such a subsidy, it would not be feasible for NPH to undertake such a publishing project.

## Next Steps

The TFC is continuing to explore existing study notes and/or the revision of existing study Bibles. The TFC will also explore the process by which we could produce a WELS study Bible and what its impact would be on manpower and ministry to complete the project.

## Conclusion

The TFC recognizes that the days of one translation in our synod are likely gone for the foreseeable future, but reaffirms its desire for the majority of our church body to coalesce around one translation. The committee will continue its work leading up to the 2013 Convention when it will bring its final recommendation regarding the feasibility of producing a confessional Lutheran translation and/or a WELS study Bible.

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:24-25).

The Translation Feasibility Committee

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