



## *Bishop's Post*

*February March 2020*

Jesus asked: “ ... are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. **The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**”  
**Mark 14, 37f**

Although the year has just begun, we are already swiftly on our way to Lent and Easter. 26 February sees the official start of Lent, a time of reflection, of considering where we are, and where we as Christians and as Church are going. This year the ongoing readings are from the gospel of Mark. (I invite you to download the Bible reading plan from [www.nelcsa.net](http://www.nelcsa.net) and join many others on this reading-journey!)

Jesus knows that a most difficult time lies before him, a time that will cost him his dignity, his strength and ultimately his life. To prepare for this he wants to spend time in prayer - alone, and yet not alone. He invites some of his closest friends, disciples to wake near him in prayer. A simple request - not too difficult to fulfill. And yet, they fall asleep. Luke, the physician, in recounting this event, gives a medical explanation: Jesus found them asleep, “exhausted from sorrow” (Lk 22,45). Mark's explanation is more theological: The flesh is weak.

I actually like Luke's explanation - not because it is an excuse, but because it shows us how many, many people react to impending crisis - closing the eyes, sleeping, hoping that, when they wake up, everything will be ok. Some people react to anxiety and fear by sleeping much more than usual.

“Wake and pray” is the challenge given by Jesus. Not just “Wake” - then it would be “wake and worry”, leading us to total exhaustion. Rather: Wake and pray. Jesus, in praying, discusses the situation with his Father, laying before him the whole scary situation. This discussion with the Father gives him the strength to say: Get up, let us go and face the challenge.

South Africa is facing countless challenges. Many of these are getting worse because of those in charge don't want to see and hope that the things will get right by themselves.

As I am writing, load shedding is causing havoc again. Political leaders are fuelling distrust, dividing the people with populist slogans of prejudice and hatred.

How shall I react? Close my eyes, hope to fall asleep, and when I wake up, things will be better?

This is were Lent comes in: I am inviting you to make this a special time of prayer, where you will put before the Lord all the challenges that we are facing. Take the time to pray more than you are doing normally. We are invited to fast, that is, to give up something. Suggestion: Give up TV - and spend at least some of that time in prayer for our country, our leaders, our church, your family, yourself - that the Father will guide us through the challenges.

I pray, that, just like Jesus, this time of praying will give you the strength to say: And now, let us get up and face the issues and deal with them!

So - between 26 February and Easter (12 April) spend more time than usual in prayer. And after Easter? Rise. Let us go and face the challenges!

Yours in Christ



## News from the Church

1. We are very happy that there is another student commencing her studies of theology this year. **Rutendo Gora** is a member of our congregation in Pietermaritzburg, and she will be joining the students of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa who are already in Stellenbosch. We wish her God's blessing for her studies!

2. The seventh **eQuip** ended successfully in Hermannsburg, KZN. Again it was a wonderful opportunity of sharing, learning and resting, getting ready for 2020. The theme "2020 Vision - Go with Purpose" was covered over three days, looking at Old and New Testament and Church History examples of people who went with purpose - or failed to realise their purpose.

3. **Pastor Peter Molchin** has resigned from his post at the **Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Eaststrand (Germiston, Brakpan, Heidelberg)**. He did this in view of the lack of finances in the congregations, resulting in them falling behind in raising the funds for cost of Pastor.

He has opted to go on early retirement.

We thank him for his work in the parish. It will be difficult to continue to build on the turnaround, which started under his tenure.

I am often asked: How can you as church allow this to happen? Many people do not realise that NELCSA does not have the reserves to carry congregations that do not make ends meet over extended periods. The only funds available for this are those given under Solidarity. The fund works as follows: Each and every congregation gets billed less than the actual costs. The shortfall is then covered

by solidarity. The idea is that those congregations that can make ends meet firstly cover the shortfall, and then, above that, contribute more to assist other congregations that cannot even cover that shortfall. Yet, because people don't understand the system, many congregations contribute less than the shortfall. They are therefore supported by the few congregations that do give more, even though they could afford to support others.

For that reason we encourage all congregations to make a concerted effort to contribute generously to solidarity, trying to at least contribute as much as they receive. Remember, solidarity will only work, when you contribute more than you receive!

5. The oldest church building in NELCSA still in use is celebrating its **150<sup>th</sup> Jubilee**. On 16 February we are celebrating the one and a half centuries that people could meet in the **Peter-Paul Church in Hermannsburg**, celebrate, receive strength, comfort and direction. Our Lord is not restricted to a church building - but it is wonderful when a building has served for such a long time!