



BISHOP'S  
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**“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Col 3,16f)**

As part of this year’s eEquip retreat we focussed on Petrus Valdes who lived in France 850 years ago. He, a wealthy business man, opted for a life of poverty (and in that process inspired Francis of Assisi). More important was that he placed a huge emphasis on the study of the Bible. He had the Bible translated into French, and conducted Bible studies and Bible lectures wherever he went. His followers (later known as the Waldensians) were famous for their Bible knowledge. Many could read and write, and both the literate and illiterate memorised large portions of the Bible, or even the whole of it.

Like Luther 300 years later, Valdes proclaimed that salvation comes through Christ, and that every Christian is called to testify to this. What made him stand out more is that he took the priesthood of ALL believers seriously - also sending out women as preachers, which was in stark contrast to the spirit of his time.

He was a devout member of the Church, and, like Luther, had no intention to break away. He regarded the Churches authority not to be above that of scripture. This resulted in him and his followers being declared heretics. Brutal persecution resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Waldensians. However, the persecution also lead to the spread of the reformation ideas, which were picked up by John Wycliffe, Jan Hus and Martin Luther in subsequent centuries. Finally, with Luther, the reformation thoughts could no longer be eradicated, also due to the development of the printing press. Now the writings could not be burned as fast as they were printed, and the seed spread all over Europe and the world.

The story of Valdes is not only relevant for historical reasons. It emphasises the important role the Bible study has played and continues to play in the renewal of the Church and the involvement of Church in society. In Colossians 3,16 Paul states that the message of Christ should dwell amongst us RICHLY - abundantly.

The year 2016 lies ahead of us with all its challenges. I encourage you to read in the Bible on a daily basis. A Bible reading plan is available at [www.elcsant.org.za](http://www.elcsant.org.za). May the word of Christ dwell in us richly, so that we can face the challenges, and act wisely, as Christians, in the Name and to the glory of Christ.

*Host Mülle*

## News from the Church

1. **Pastor Dr Detlev Tönsing** was elected by St Peters Pretoria on a half post in the congregation. Church Council of ELCSA (N-T) has requested him to fill 50% of the Program Facilitator post for the next two years. We are busy defining the expectations in this regard. His wife, **Pastor Dr Gertrud Tönsing**, has accepted a post-doctorate position at Unisa. May God bless the family in their re-settling, and also the work that lies ahead.

2. **Pastor Dr Claudia Nolte-Schamm** has accepted the call by St Martini, Cape Town and will commence duties there in the second half of 2016. We are happy that she can return to the full time ministry, and wish her and her family a good settling in!

3. After consultation with the affected pastors and congregations Church Council has decided to end the Coll-times of **Pastors Rolf Schmidt** and **Frank Schütte**. In both cases their congregational councils (Harburg and Augsburg) expressed the wish to call them as full time pastors. The process is on the way. We wish them God's blessing for this next phase in the ministry.

4. With the various vacancies that exist, we are grateful for the pastors that have been or are helping out.

**Pastor Bernd Jacobs** with his wife Christa helped out for 3 Months in Nelspruit. They returned back to Hannover on 12 January 2016.

**Pastor Dr Gertrud Tönsing** helped out in Durban for 2015.

**Pastor Georg Scriba** is helping out in Durban for 2016.

**Pastor Werner Harms** agreed to assist in Piet Retief on a part time basis.

**Pastor Dieter Harms** regularly helps out in Hillbrow.

5. The annual **eEquip retreat** took place from 2-7 January in Red Acres, Cedara. Despite extremely hot weather we had a good time of fellowship and getting ready for 2016.

The next eEquip is planned for 2-7 January 2017.

6. ELCSA (N-T) has decided to exchange its 12.5% shares at our office block against a share in the open erven next to the offices in Bonaero Park. This means that ELCSA is now the sole share holder of the **Lutheran Conference Centre**, and we are renting the office space from ELCSA. We continue to be committed to close cooperation with ELCSA.

7. The financial situation of ELCSA has necessitated the Southern African Lutheran Theological Training Trust, **SALTTT**, to close down operations at the **Lutheran Theological Institute in Pietermaritzburg**. UELCSA Students wishing to enrol for theological studies should contact their bishop. Currently UELCSA has decided to recommend the University of Stellenbosch as preferred institution for undergraduate students for the ministry.

This brings to an end a 40 year relationship with the University of Kwazulu Natal. A reflection on this will follow at a later stage.

## 2016 eEquip Report: Theme: Growing through challenges



The 2016 eEquip retreat was conducted at Red Acres in Pietermaritzburg from 2-7 January 2016. The participants were of different age groups, from pre-school to pensioners of different denominations. They all enjoyed the tranquillity of the place as it promoted and enabled one to meditate, grow in faith and come nearer to God. Among the facilitators we were honoured to have Sister Happiness from Kenosis who shared with us her journey of calling, how to respond to your call, how to empty yourself and do what you are called to do hence she was able to overcome various obstacles through God's grace. Different methods of teaching were used such as group discussions, role play and films etc. the following content was covered:

1. Dealing with controversies in relation to tension in all dimensions e.g. church, community and society and contradictions in the Bible. The value of the prophets in our life and country was discussed as in the Bible.
2. Where are you being a Christian in 2016 with all personal societal and political tensions conflict and challenge? Three of the eEquip participants were part of the original June 16, 1976 march. We heard the story of the run up to the event, as well as the years of torture and imprisonment that they then encountered, and how they had to cope with this. On that day the Mandela Capture Site and Howick Falls were visited.
3. The history of Petrus Valdes and Martin Luther were covered. Valdes focussed on studying the Bible and the role of lay people also in preaching. We realised that we continuously need to avoid falling prey to teachings of prosperity through giving money to "buy" God. The emphasis is on having faith, loving God and to love one another. We need to trust God as the provider who provides abundantly for all through His grace.

Nkepile Masite; Mpho Satekge, Matshepo Satekge

## **“Discussion Document on Homosexuality**

- with particular emphasis on the question of employment of clergy” – This is the official title of the Study paper presented at synod 2015 and passed on to congregations for discussion. “About time” some are thinking. “Forget it” others say. This is one of the topics where you are saying something even when you are keeping silent.

Since its beginning the Church had to deal with controversial issues. Some of these are long forgotten and the outcome taken for granted. The very first Apostolic gathering (Synod) for instance grappled with the question whether circumcision is compulsory for Christians.

At the time of the Reformation a hot debate raged about whether priests are allowed to get married. The Roman Catholic Church battles with this even today.

Galileo Galilei and Nicolaus Copernicus had their disputes with the Church regarding Cosmology and the Bible.

There were topics such as slavery, ordination of women, apartheid, war, refugees and migrants, homosexuality. Each of these was hotly debated on – and some still are. Some of them resulted in the Church breaking apart. Some led to persecution and even killing sprees. In many cases only history revealed who was right. But in each case it needed Christians that had the courage to deal with the topic without the benefit of hind sight.

Why do we as Christians deal with such topics? Because we know that we are accountable to God. For that reason we have to deal with them diligently and with care: What does the Bible say? What does our Faith command? What is our conscience pointing out? What does reason and research show?

The study paper is one such document that introduces a hotly debated topic. It wants to help us to reflect on the topic responsibly, so that we can react responsibly. You can download the paper under “Quick Links” on the home page [www.elcsant.org.za](http://www.elcsant.org.za).

In the future, our descendants will judge how we dealt with it. Will they shake their heads in disbelief? Will they commend us? I don’t know. All I know is that it is our duty to deal with the topic diligently. “Teach me your way, o Lord”, the psalmist prayed in Psalm 86,11.

I invite you to make this your prayer when dealing with this topic, and when discussing it in your home groups and congregation.

“Give me a sign of your goodness” the psalmist prays at the end of the Psalm. May we too experience that God is good, and that his intentions for us are good.



Horst Müller