

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (N-T)

Church Council Report to Synod

Hermannsburg, 14-17 September 2017

1 Introduction

The synod takes place during the 500th commemoration of the protestant reformation. This is an ideal time to reflect on who we are, where we are, why we are, and where we are going. Although Martin Luther is regarded by many Lutherans as the great reformer, during this year it became clear that he is admired across all denominations. From Roman Catholic to Pentecostal Churches were reflecting on him and his message during this year. Sometimes it was actually embarrassing to realise that non-Lutherans are more aware of the theological issues of the message of the reformation than many Lutherans.

This is due to the fact that the core aspects of the Reformation are not "Lutheran", but also core issues for the Church as a whole. Luther never intended to develop an own, niche theology to be claimed by a single denomination. His intention was to lift up the gospel of Christ, the crucified and risen, the Saviour of the world. His thoughts were not Lutheran, but the result of careful research of the scriptures, own reflection, meditation and prayer.

Right to the end he was very much aware that his insights were temporal, always to be judged by and measured against scripture, and especially against the message of the cross of Christ.

This means that "Lutheran" actually is to be ecumenical, willing to learn from other denominations, to be challenged and corrected by fellow Christians.

To celebrate 500 years of Reformation invites us to look at our times and our challenges asking: "What is the Christ minded response in our time?" and not: "What is the Lutheran response?". We may try to imagine what Luther would have said to all these issues, but that is not the point. The point is that we do what Luther asked his followers to do: Study the scriptures, ask what promotes Christ, and define ways, rules, laws and guidelines that at this moment in time serve Christ best.

The theme of synod: "Fear not ... I have called you by name" is taken from Isaiah 43. God is calling his people in exile to go back to the promised land. But it is not a trip back in history, not a commemoration and restoration of previous times and systems. Rather it is a journey into a new future in the old "Heimat". Nothing will be the same as in the past, except ... that God is calling, God is guiding, and he has a plan.

This report first looks at the last two years of ELCSA (N-T) (Points 2-5) and then on the way forward (6). We can best move forward if we understand where we are coming from!

2 Personalia

2.1 Deaths: Pastor emeritus Horst Meyberg passed away on 12 March 2017, aged 84. After studying Theology in Hermannsburg, Germany, he was ordained in Kroondal, South Africa in 1959. He served the congregation for a few months before becoming pastor in Bodibe, ELCSA Western Diocese, followed by Bethel as school pastor. In 1983 he became pastor in Vanderbijlpark. In 1989 the ELM appointed him as their senior for Southern Africa, until his retirement. Since then he has been helping out

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in many congregations, but especially in Pretoria, right to the end. We thank God for the blessing that he could be to many, and the blessings that he himself received during his life. We pray for his wife, Hildegard, his children and grand-children. May they experience the comfort of the Lord in this time.

It is always difficult to decide which deaths to remember in this report. Traditionally we focus on those employed by the Church. But so many people who played an important role in our Church or in their congregations on a voluntary basis have passed away. Naming some will inevitably lead to the question: Why was so and so not mentioned?

If now two names are mentioned, they stand for these many, many dedicated people that served with distinction. Ms Maxi Nürnberg never was employed by the Church, but accompanied her husband Klaus through his training for theology and then to Umpumulo, Pretoria, Pietermaritzburg and back to Pretoria. Wherever the couple went, she became involved, either with the training of students, or in the local congregation, training children's Church helpers or leading children's Church. We thank God for her dedication.

Maria Hillermann for many years was the leader of our Choir association. In this capacity she did not only lead the planning and execution of choir festivals, but also worked many hours to transcribe the music and prepare booklets for these festivals. Apart from that she was actively involved as lay preacher in her community.

We remember them, their loved ones, and all those not mentioned here, who passed away during the last two years. We praise God for what they meant to many people, and pray that he will comfort their loved ones.

2.2 Retirements:

2.2.1 Pastor Siegfried Hambrock retired in June 2016. He was ordained in 1977 and first served in Vanderbijlpark. In 1984 he was elected as pastor of St Peters Pretoria. In that period the founding of the Johannesgemeinde in the east of Pretoria was in planning, and when the congregation was established, he became the pastor there. In 2003 he was elected as pastor of St Martini congregation in Cape Town, where he then served until his retirement in 2016 at the age of 67. We are grateful for the many years of service that he had in our Church, not only in the congregation but also as Dean of the Northern Circuit and in various committees and projects such as the "Studenttagung". He and his wife Astrid, who is not yet retired, live in Cape Town. May his retirement be a blessed time, and may they continue to be a blessing!

2.3 New Pastors

2.3.1 Work permits

After a period of almost two years where virtually every visa application of prospective vicars, retirees and pastors from Germany was turned down, since May 2016 all applications were granted. The period of declined visas had quite an impact on the planning for the coming of vicars as well as filling of new posts via the EKD. One pastor seconded to the ELCSA (Cape Church) had to return to Germany permanently when only part of his family were granted visas. The reasons behind the declines were vague or even irrelevant. Hopefully this period is now over and we can plan again, also receiving vicars for further training and retirees to help out.

2.3.2 The congregations Gerdau and Potchefstroom have agreed to receive Vicar Jan

		Duvenhage for a probation period of two years. Jan stems from the Dutch Reformed Church. He studied theology by correspondence and served our congregations in Polokwane and Duiwelskloof in a honorary capacity after the dissolving of the Northern Parish. During 2017 and 2018 he will complete the training towards ordination. We are grateful to Bishop em. Dieter Lilje for accompanying him and doing ongoing training with him, as well as helping out with the German services in Gerdau and Potchefstroom.	134	post to do outreach amongst German Expats in Gauteng came to an end as well. This was a post co-funded by the EKD (80%) and the congregation (20%).
		With this step our Church is taking a new approach to enable people from other professions to cross over and be trained towards ordination. This is done in consultation with, and recognised by UELCSA. We are grateful to Jan and the congregations for their willingness to embark on this route. May God bless them!	135	This was a post co-funded by the EKD (80%) and the congregation (20%).
2.3.3		A similar route is being followed with Mr Randolph Kassier. A farmer from Reitz, he has been studying theology by correspondence and served as lay minister in the Methodist Church in the eastern Free State. He wishes to enter full time ministry in our Church. Currently we envisage placing him in Vanderbijlpark, where he is already helping out every few weeks.	136	Dean Edwin Dedekind applied for a post in Germany, in the Rhenish Church, and, after being elected by the Bendorf congregation, started his duties there on 1 April 2017. We thank Dean Dedekind for the 23 years of service that he did in ELCSA (N-T), first in Germiston, then in St Peter's by the Lake. Apart from being Dean of the Central Circuit he also served on the Mission Committee and was active in the youth work in the circuit.
2.3.4		Vicar Martin Büttner successfully completed his second theological examination on 28 July 2017. He was ordained on 14 August 2017 in New Germany, where he has now commenced his tenure as Pastor-Coll. This is the first phase after ordination. A pastor is placed into a congregation by agreement with the congregational council, for a period of up to 4 years, after which the pastor can be elected, called, or apply for a post in another congregation.	137	Pastor Michael Diezun completed his term in Midrand and Kelvin and returned to Germany in June 2017 to accept a position in his regional Church. We thank him for his involvement not only in the congregations but also in the study commission and coworker training of our Church.
2.3.5		St Peters by the Lake in Johannesburg has elected Pastor Dieter Trümpelmann from East London as their new pastor. He is to start there in January 2018. Let us pray for him and his family as they now go through the time of farewell and change. May God strengthen and bless them!	138	Pastor Olaf Giesecke came to the East Rand Lutheran Church (Germiston, Heidelberg, Brakpan) in 2008 after completing his studies at the ELM (Hermannsburg, Germany). He was ordained in our Church and thus became a "local" pastor. He however decided to go back to Germany, and after being offered a position in the Hanoverian Church, returned at the end of June 2017. We thank him for his involvement beyond congregational work, especially regarding co-worker training. It was very sad that his dad passed away unexpectedly just three weeks before his return.
2.3.6		The Thomas congregation, Northrand, Johannesburg elected Pastor Wilko Hunger from the Church of Hanover, circuit Wesermünde, as their new pastor. He is sent to us via the EKD on a six year term, which can be extended by another three years. He and his wife Jutta did receive a visa so that they can commence their work in South Africa on 1 September 2017. They arrived on 25 August 2017, and could already participate in the All Lutheran Service on 27 August in Pretoria. What a good way to start off! May they soon settle in their new home and have a blessed time in South Africa, whilst being a blessing to many!	139	Pastor Anja Spiske Left for the ELCSA (Cape Church) where she is serving the Port Elisabeth Congregation since November 2015.
2.4	2.4	Pastors leaving:	140	Pastor Dr Claudia Nolte-Schamm was seconded to the ELCSA (Cape Church), serving the St Martini Congregation in Cape Town after the retirement of Pastor Siegfried Hambrock. We are glad that she is back in full time ministry, albeit not in our Church!
122		We are being asked why we allow pastors to leave while we have a shortage. Pastors sent via the EKD are always sent on a limited term basis and have to return. Regarding local pastors, the law on pastors makes it clear that pastors can indeed apply for positions outside our Church and do not need the Church's permission to do so. Similarly, pastors from other Churches can apply for positions in our Church. The process in this regard is explained below (2.10)	141	We pray that the Lord will bless these pastors and pastors' families as they settle in their new tasks and homes. May he continue to make them a blessing there as well!
123	2.4.1	Pastors Heiko Zürn and Katrin Zürn-Steffens ended their term in the Northrand congregation prematurely, due to uncertainty regarding visas and the fact that suitable positions in Germany were offered to both of them. They returned end of July 2016 (in stead of end of August 2017). We thank them for their involvement also in the co-worker training in the region. With that the project	142	2.5 Relocations
124			143	2.5.1 Pastor Dr Detlev Tönsing relocated from the University of Kwa Zulu Natal to Pretoria. He serves in a shared post between St Peters Pretoria and Program Facilitator of ELCSA (N-T) till the end of 2017.
125			144	The congregation St Peters Pretoria has, on 20 August 2017 decided to again appoint two full time pastors as from 1 January 2018, and elected Pastor Dr Detlev Tönsing in the second full time post.
126			145	Pastor Dr Gertrud Tönsing was accepted for a post-doctorate at Unisa
127			146	Pastor Frank Schütte was elected by the Augsburg Congregation after completing his Pastor-coll time.
128			147	Pastor Rolf Schmidt was elected by the Harburg congregation after his Pastor-coll-time was ended.
129			148	Pastor Remo Köhne was elected by the Church of Peace, Hillbrow, on a half post. The "Wings for life" school for autistic children in Vanderbijlpark offered him a half post as counsellor to the school family. After the departure of Dean
130			149	Edwin Dedekind he also took on the position of Dean of the Central Circuit.
131			150	On 22 January 2017 Pastor Mark Meier was inducted as pastor in Piet Retief.
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			180	2.6 Pastors and lay preachers helping out in vacant congregations:

181 2.6.1 Pastor em. Bernd Jacobs with his wife Christa helped out for 3 Months in
182 Nelspruit. They returned back to Hannover, Germany on 12 January 2016. They
183 had planned to come for a year, but did not receive a visa.
184 2.6.2 Pastor Georg Scriba was helping out in the Durban parish for 2016.
185 Pastor Werner Harms agreed to assist during the vacancy in Piet Retief on a part
186 time basis.
187 2.6.4 Pastor Dieter Harms regularly helps out in the central circuit, currently in St
188 Peters by the Lake.
189 2.6.5 Pastor Dr Gertrud Tönsing is regularly preaching in vacant congregations in
190 Gauteng.
191 2.6.6 It is good to see a growing number of lay people training for lay preaching and
192 administering the sacraments. Especially during the large number of vacancies
193 they play an ever more important role in the Church. It needs to be noted that
194 they are, however, not only stand-ins when a pastor is not available, but co-
195 workers adding substantial value to the lives of congregations! We thank all these
196 lay preachers and pastors for their commitment!

197 2.7 A new venture.
198 In 2014 a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pastor Rosalie
199 Madika, came to us. After participating in the 5th year training and doing an
200 internship in Midrand/Kelvin, we are currently negotiating with the Evangelical
201 Lutheran Mission in lower Saxony (Hermannsburg) for funding of a Refugee and
202 Migrant Ministry, linked to the St Peters Pretoria congregation. This ministry will
203 focus on displaced people from Francophone Africa that end up in Pretoria and
204 surrounds. You will be kept updated on the developments.

205 2.8 Pastors on leave of absence
206 2.8.1 Pastor Georg Meyer requested extension of his leave of absence till 2019 in order
207 to complete his studies in Germany.

208 2.9 Pastors from outside of UELCSA applying for positions in ELCSA (N-T)
209 2.9.1 Church Council discussed this at length and made the following proposal to
210 UELCSA, to ensure that such pastors meet the criteria set by UELCSA.
211 *(Such pastors are encouraged to let their Church leaders know about their
212 intentions. Legally however they cannot be forced to inform their Church before
213 they resign.)*
214 The following is required from pastors not ordained within UELCSA wanting to
215 apply for a post within UELCSA:
216 1. Written application with CV, profile and qualifications (including certificates)
217 2. Follow up interview with the bishop
218 3. Colloquium¹ dealing with Church Laws, Confessions of the Church, Themes,
219 Practical issues
220 4. Granting of eligibility to be elected in a congregation
221 5. Apply for a post without guarantee
222 6. Election

223 7. Appointment by ELCSA (N-T) with a temporary contract for one year, which
224 can then become a permanent contract.
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226 3 Statistics
227 3.1 Congregations
228 3.1.1 The Lutherkirche and St Pauls congregations in Durban (DELP) at the previous
229 synod had requested a debt freeze, which was granted. During 2016 various
230 options of moving forward were investigated, and finally the congregations
231 decided to close down with the idea that a new congregation in the greater
232 Durban area should be established. The closing service was on 29 January 2017.
233 The new congregation is to be combined with the work of the Seamen's Mission
234 for at least the next six years. Church Council has called Dean Ron Küsel into
235 this new task. He started on this combined post on 1 July 2017. The buildings of
236 the two congregations are being sold and the monies to be used for the
237 establishing of a new congregation.
238 The first task of Dean Küsel is to do a thorough research as to planned
239 developments in the greater Durban area, and, together with a planning team
240 identify a suitable location and develop a plan of action to start the new
241 congregation. He will give a first report at synod, and will be inducted as
242 seamen's pastor during the synod closing service.
243 For the members of DELP this has been a trying and also sad period. But it also
244 is a time of hope that a new congregation will soon sprout and grow in strength
245 and blessings.
246 3.1.2 Vacancies: At the time of writing of this report the following pastors' posts in
247 congregations are vacant: Nelspruit, Midrand and Kelvin, East Rand Lutheran
248 Church, Vanderbijlpark and Verden-Dundee. With the retirement of Pastor
249 Andreas Wernecke in March 2018 Kempton Park will become vacant. Since
250 Verden-Dundee and Nelspruit are currently only able to carry half a post, and
251 there are no suitable candidates for such a half post, they will remain vacant for
252 the time being. We thank Pastor Dieter Lilje who helps once a month in
253 Nelspruit, and Pastor Werner Harms who helps in Verden-Dundee for one year.
254 The other congregations are at various stages of finding suitable candidates to fill
255 the vacancies.
256 3.1.3 Interventions in Congregations
257 Synod 2015 requested that Church Council observes more closely the
258 development in congregations in order to intervene before a situation (especially
259 a financial situation) deteriorates beyond repair. Meetings and discussions in this
260 regard were held with Eastrand, West Rand, Vanderbijlpark, Church of Peace,
261 Trinity Zululand and Moorleigh. In some cases the meetings were initiated by the
262 congregations, which is always preferable. Those congregations that are currently
263 vacant were requested to use the vacancy period to cover outstanding debts. In
264 almost all cases these interventions yielded positive results.

265 3.2 Membership and Service attendance
266 Many congregations are working in more than one language and have two, or in
267 some cases even three services per Sunday. The statistics are incomplete, due to 3
268 congregations not having submitted their annual statistical returns. Based on what
269 was received, the following can be reported:

¹ A Colloquium is a discussion between the candidate and a panel appointed by UELCSA

The table below shows the total number of congregations, and then the statistics for the last year on year, 5 years and 10 years comparison for growth and service attendance.

Congregations showing increase	Year on year Size / attendance	Last 5 years		Last 10 years	
		Size / attendance	Size / attendance	Size / attendance	Size / attendance
Total (30 out of 34 submitted)	10 / 8	12 / 10	11 / 11		
Northern Circuit (7 out of 8)	2 / 1	3 / 3	2 / 2		
Central Circuit (8 out of 9)	3 / 2	2 / 4	3 / 6		
Eastern Circuit (4 out of 5)	0 / 2	1 / 1	1 / 1		
Southern Circuit (11 out of 11)	5 / 3	6 / 2	5 / 2		

From this table it is clear that more than two thirds of the congregations are experiencing a decline in membership and service attendance. This obviously is reason for concern. It cannot be seen as a rural matter, since the pattern is very similar in urban and rural congregations.

Below a table of the membership, based on the statistics received, with estimates of those not received.

Circuit	2016	2011	2006
Total	9007	9691	9741
Northern Circuit	3017	3051	2968
Central Circuit	2870	3143	3216
Eastern Circuit	810	1045	1066
Southern Circuit	2310	2452	2491

We hope that the picture at the next synod will be a better one, also in view of service attendance.

3.3 Church Life

3.3.1 Festivals

Church festivals played very different roles in various traditions of our Church. For the Hermannsburg Church they were an integral part of Church life, and well attended. For the Transvaal Church they were the exception, since the congregations existed quite independent of each other. Those growing up in ELCSA are used to

Church Festivals where thousands attend. During the 36 years of ELCSA (N-T)'s existence many debates took place on how these festivals should be treated. Some circuits agreed that Church festivals in their circuit are to be attended by all, others left it for each congregation to decide.

Church Council is of the opinion that Church festivals do play an important role to enhance Church life. At these events participants experience the diversity of our Church and are exposed to old and new traditions. Musicians can experience the joy of participating in a much larger group, and to tackle pieces that a congregation on its own cannot. We thank all those who plan such festivals and encourage members to make a point of attending - perhaps even use this opportunity to travel as a group from your congregation and experience this fellowship as well!

Apart from various regional festivals the following Church festivals took place: 2016 Brass Festival, Piet Retief; 2017 Choir Festival Wartburg, which was also the major Reformation festival of ELCSA (N-T). In 2018 Northrand congregation is hosting the brass festival. Can we break the attendance records?

3.3.2 Visitations

The visitations form an important part of our Church Life. They are not inspections, but a visit by outsiders (normally the Dean and Circuit council), with the purpose of helping the congregation to look at itself through the eyes of others. Although they are normally intensive, they are also generally experienced as very helpful, encouraging, and for the visiting team a period of learning and growing. Thank you to all who do these visitations! The following congregations were visited:

Concordia (Gerdau) April 2016; New Germany June 2016; Augsburg June 2016; Harburg: May 2016; Bethany: August 2016; St Peters by the Lake August 2016; Potchefstroom November 2016; Hermannsburg March 2017; Vryheid May 2017; Hillcrest August 2017

3.3.3 eQuip

The participation at the annual eQuip retreat doubled from 2016 to 2017. The retreat brings together people from all walks of life and ages on a journey of reflection, recreation, learning and exchange. The theme of 2016 was "Growing through challenges", looking at how people in history coped with challenges, and what we can learn in that regard for our own time.

2017, of course! had to focus on a reformation theme. "Grace for you - eQuipped to reform" wanted to show that reformation is not a historical event only, but an ongoing process.

The theme for 2018 is "Alive!!" God is the giver of life. How do the Old Testament laws and 10 Commandments link up with life? We believe that God values life. How do we as Christians deal with situations that threaten life? Jesus is the living Word. What does it mean for us as Christians to follow the Living Word, as opposed to written commandments or doctrines? We also want to study 1 Corinthians as example of how early Christians tried (and failed!) to live out and follow the Living Word. Please consider attending this retreat from 2 to 7 January 2018 in Hermannsburg, KZN. This is one of few opportunities where families can attend together - up to four generations! So far we managed three!

3.3.4 General Pastors' convention from 19 – 23 September 2016

at Red Acres Retreat near Howick, KZN. Theme: "Being Church Here and Now" Due to the ending of merger talks between Cape and N-T Churches the focus of this convention shifted. Although the merger was off the table, the pastors agreed on the importance of good co-operation and exchange for the future.

349 3.3.5 Theological Study Commission (TSC)
350 Discussion document on Homosexuality
351 The TSC has submitted a report on the process so far. This topic remains to be highly
352 emotive. Since it is not merely a theoretical discussion, but affects the lives of people,
353 families and communities, Church Council is of the opinion that a decision on this
354 document and its recommendations is currently not called for.

355 3.4 Properties
356 3.4.1 ELCSEA (N-T) has decided to exchange it's 12.5% shares at our office block in
357 Bonaero Park against ELCSA's share in the open erven 23 between the offices
358 and Atlas Road, Bonaero Park. This means that ELCSA (N-T) now fully owns
359 erven 23, and ELCSA is the sole share holder of the Lutheran Conference Centre,
360 and we are renting the office space from ELCSA. We continue to be committed
361 to close cooperation with ELCSA.
362 3.4.2 During this year (2017), Church council has negotiated with Deutsche Schule
363 Hermannsburg to sell the timber farm "Endeavour" to the school. The Endeavour
364 farm was donated to ELCSEA(N-T) by the Hermannsburg Mission (now called
365 ELM) in 1992 for the furtherance of Christian teaching and living and for the
366 benefit of the community, namely the Hermannsburg School. ELCSEA(N-T) then
367 leased the farm to the school at no cost and the school in turn sub-leased it to
368 another business. The school thus benefited from the lease income over all these
369 years and ELCSEA(N-T) benefited from the capital gain in the property value.
370 ELCSEA (N-T) and DSH agreed to sell the property at a market related price of
371 R10,486m to the school and to allocate the proceeds in equal shares to the school
372 and the Church. ELCSEA(N-T) agreed to donate 50% back to the school in lieu
373 of the current support to the school. ELCSEA (N-T) retained the balance in a fund
374 to further utilize for the furtherance of Christian teaching at the school by funding
375 the school pastor half post.

376 4 Church relations
377 4.1 Merger with ELCSEA (Cape Church).
378 At the combined Church Council meeting of ELCSEA (N-T) and ELCSEA (Cape) in
379 Strand from 22 to 24 July 2016 the following was agreed upon:
380 "1. After following up on the task assigned by the respective synods, councils came
381 to the following conclusion:
382 We respect and appreciate each other's uniqueness. After intensive discussions we
383 concluded that the merger discussions will not be continued at this stage.
384 2. The Cape Church is busy working at the ecclesiology, to spell out their identity.
385 This is a deep discernment process of listening to God's Word and each other; this
386 must also happen on congregational level.
387 - Who or whose are we?
388 - What are we called to do?
389 - How are we going to do it?
390 3. We affirm that we will continue to engage in close cooperation (let's do together
391 whatever we can do together) and also learn from and celebrate each other's
392 differences thereby enriching each other."
393 We will thus continue as two independent Churches in close co-operation with each

394 other.
395 A direct result of this decision, to be ratified by synod, is that those matters which
396 were put on hold in view of a merger, now are or need to be addressed: Revision of
397 the Order of Church life; revisiting our laws and bylaws ensuring that they still serve
398 the Church and are relevant; defining the way forward for our Church.

**Motion of Church Council to synod:
Synod ratifies the decisions of both the Church Councils of ELCSEA (Cape) and
ELCSA (N-T) not to continue with merger talks**

399 4.2 UELCSA - United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, comprising of
400 ELCSEA (Cape), the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia and ourselves.
401 With the sale of our Pietermaritzburg assets and the withdrawal from the Southern
402 African Lutheran Theological Training Trust (SALTTT) UELCSA is now focussing
403 on re-establishing a strong theological training. Although we have been invited by the
404 University of Stellenbosch to sign a co-operation agreement, we have not done so,
405 since we still hope that we can do it together with our Lutheran sister Church.
406 UELCSA continues being responsible not only for our theological training, but also
407 to place interns and carry the costs of these.
408 Once the first students start to study at Stellenbosch, bursaries will require a steady
409 stream of financing from the member Churches.
410 4.2.1 At it's synod from 22 to 23 October 2016 Bishop Burgert Brand was elected as
411 Chairman of Church Council (Presiding bishop) and Mr Wolfgang Fechter as
412 president of synod. With the closing of the Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI)
413 in Pietermaritzburg, the sale of UELCSA's share of the properties and the
414 transfer of the Southern African Theological Training Trust to ELCSEA, the 42
415 years of involvement in Pietermaritzburg come to a sad ending. Although both
416 UELCSA and ELCSEA stated very clearly that we want to continue working
417 together in training pastors, and Bishop Filter had been tasked by both Churches
418 through the Southern African Theological Training Trust (SALTTT) to negotiate
419 with Stellenbosch University, currently the Churches are going their own way.
420 4.2.2 Theological Training
421 4.2.2.1 With the closure of the Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI) in Pietermaritzburg
422 and the ending of our agreement with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal,
423 UELCSA recommended to ELCSEA that the properties in Pietermaritzburg be
424 sold to avoid further escalation of costs and deterioration of assets. Eventually
425 UELCSA only sold its portion of the LTI. In order for the sale to be finalised
426 UELCSA still had to carry the outstanding costs to the municipality. These were
427 incurred by ELCSEA, who was not able to pay for them.
428 With this sad ending a forty years of theological training of UELCSA in
429 Pietermaritzburg have come to an end.
430 4.2.2.2 Bishop Gilbert Filter will report separately on the current arrangements with the
431 University of Stellenbosch. This is our recommended University for those who
432 wish to study theology towards full time ministry.
433 4.2.3 Students:
434 We are glad that Martin Büttner and Martha Weich have completed their second
435 theological examination and can now work as pastors in ELCSEA (N-T) and ELCSEA
436 (Cape) respectively. Matome Sadiki is preparing for his second theological
437 examination which he will do in the Hanoverian Church before returning to South

438 Africa.

439 Two more students are currently studying in Germany: Christa Springer (Northrand)
440 in Tübingen and Anneliese Hofmann (Grootfontein) in Münster.

441 For 2018 we currently have one new student, Hermann Düvel (Braunschweig), who
442 has registered to study in Stellenbosch.

443 Furthermore Ms Laurence Thom from New Germany is continuing with her BTh
444 studies by correspondence.

445 4.3 ELCSA- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.²

446 Although a small task team was formed to continue the engagement with ELCSA, as
447 suggested by the previous two synods, no progress has been made. Due to the
448 financial situation of ELCSA, which continues to worsen, it is difficult to get such
449 talks going. Congregations are encouraged to seek the contact at grass roots level and
450 expand on that.

451 With the retirement of Bishop MM Dithlale, Bishop AM Mnisi of the Eastern
452 Diocese was elected as presiding bishop. We wish him wisdom and strength for the
453 task given to him.

454 4.4 FELSISA - Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa³

455 Recent tensions due to public defamatory statements against ELCSA (N-T) resulted
456 in Bishops H Müller and D Reinstorf together writing a letter to our constituencies.
457 The letter stated that public celebrations are not the space where such statements
458 should be vented. Rather dialogue should be chosen, where both sides can voice their
459 opinion. More importantly the letter focuses on the prayer of Jesus in John 17. Jesus
460 prays for unity amongst his followers not for the sake of unity, but for the sake of the
461 witness to the world - "that the world may see that you have sent me". This compels
462 us to seek ways of co-operation rather than publicly attacking another.

464 **The recommendation by the bishops of ELCSA (N-T) and FELSISA is that a
465 small theological committee comprising of two members from each side should
466 meet to discuss the points of tension and disagreements.**

467 Since then two events - a Reformation Service in Augsburg and the All Lutheran
468 Service in Pretoria - were well attended by both Churches. May this continue to the
glory of God!

469 4.5 LUCSA- Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa⁴

470 The LUCSA General Assembly in October 2015 elected Bishop H Müller as
471 president for a term of three years. This means that he has to preside over the
472 Assembly, Council and Officers meetings. Fortunately the preparation and day to day
473 operations are done by the Executive Director, Dr David Tswaedi, his secretary Ms

²<http://www.elcsa.org.za/home.html>

³<http://www.felsisa.org.za/>

⁴<http://www.lucsa.org/>

474

Ann Mokhine and the other permanent staff members of LUCSA.

475 LUCSA played a key role in the preparation of the Joint Celebration by Lutheran
476 Churches of the 500 years of Reformation. Between three and four thousand people
477 participated in this wonderful celebration, which was the first of its kind in our
478 history, involving our Church, ELCSA, FELSISA and its sister Church
479 LCSA(Lutheran Church of Southern Africa), the Moravian Church and the
480 Confessional Lutheran Synod South Africa. It was good to see so many members of
481 ELCSA (N-T) supporting this service either in the brass band, choir or as
482 congregants. Also in the preparation committee our representatives played a crucial
483 role. Thank you to them for their perseverance and positivity. Pictures of the event
484 can be seen at⁵

485 LUCSA also hosted the Africa Pre-assembly to the General Assembly of the
486 Lutheran World Federation in Johannesburg at the beginning of the year.

487 4.6 JDDJ - Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. (Download in English or 488 German from⁶)

489 This document is the result of many decades of discussion between the Roman
490 Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It focusses on the core
491 Lutheran teaching of justification through faith, and shows how these Churches
492 understand and formulate this doctrine. Also it rescinds the century old
493 condemnations that the Churches expressed towards another on this topic in the
494 sixteenth century. Before the signing in 1999 the member Churches of the LWF -
495 including ELCSA (N-T) discussed and adopted the document. Since then it was also
496 signed by the Methodist Church, and in July this year by the World Reformed
497 Communion.

498 At the request of the Catholic Bishops Conference we started with regular meetings
499 in 2016 to discuss how we as Churches in South Africa can let this declaration be of
500 more relevance to our congregations. This group has since expanded to include most
501 of the traditional Churches of the Reformation. A joint prayer meeting was held
502 during the Catholic Bishop's Conference in January 2017, where Bishop Müller gave
503 a short message.

504 Future topics that we want to discuss are the office of ministry and the sacraments.
505 CUC - Church Unity Commission⁷

506 This body, consisting of the Methodist, Anglican, Congregational and Presbyterian
507 Churches, is now inviting the observer Churches, of which we are one, to become full
508 members. Full membership entails the mutual recognition of ordination and the
509 possibility of exchange of pastors.

510 4.8 SACC - South African Council of Churches.⁸

⁵<https://www.facebook.com/LutheranCommunion/photos/>

⁶<https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-joint-declaration-doctrine-justification>

⁷<http://Churchunitycommission.org/>

⁸<http://sacc.org.za/>

511 4.8.1 “The South Africa we pray for” - This initiative of the South African Council of
512 Churches is continuing and gaining momentum. In our challenging times in
513 South Africa it is important that the Church community plays an active role in
514 guiding the nation towards a healthy future. Prayer is one important aspect, and
515 information on what needs to be addressed in our nation the other. Please keep
516 this in your prayers!

517 4.8.2 Preparing for democracy - The bulk of voters for the next election are members
518 of Churches, as are the bulk of those who will take up office after the election in
519 parliament. The Churches must use the time in the run up to the election (not only
520 the last few weeks!) to educate our membership on the responsibilities of voters
521 and those elected. As voters we need to inform ourselves about the various
522 parties and their strategies and track records. After voting, we need to hold those
523 elected accountable. Those taking up office after the election need to be made
524 aware of their responsibilities and accountability to the nation, rather than only
525 to the party.
526 As such the Churches’ involvement is not party political, but to the benefit of the
527 country as a whole.

528 4.8.3 Moral decline. The decay of moral standards in South Africa is alarming.
529 Corruption, non-accountability and carelessness are spreading on all levels of
530 society. The SACC, at its conference in November 2017 wants to focus on this
531 aspect and as Church take back responsibility to be the “moral conscience” of our
532 society.

533 4.8.4 ELM - Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionswerk in Niedersachsen⁹
534 The co-operation with the ELM continues on a fruitful and constructive level. We
535 appreciate the presence of the regional representative, Rev. Dr Joe Lüdemann, at our
536 synod. The ELM also facilitates the exchange of volunteers, and here Rev Elke
537 Carrihill is employed on a part time basis to be the South African contact person.
538 Apart from that various projects are supported, and, as mentioned earlier on, we hope
539 to get a “Refugee and Migrant Ministry” going in Pretoria with their help.

540 4.8.5 VELKD - Vereinigte Evangelisch-Luthersiche Kirche Deutschlands¹⁰
541 The co-operation with our Lutheran Partners in Germany and their representative for
542 Southern Africa, Rev Dr Christine Keim, remains fruitful and is treasured by us. The
543 uncomplicated way of communicating is refreshing. We are grateful that the VELKD
544 also sponsored the All Lutheran Service in Pretoria with 6000€, and assisted with the
545 travel costs of Prof. Pat Keifert from the USA, who did workshops in our Church and
546 the ELCSA (Cape Church). The VELKD also gave Bishop Müller a grant to help
547 cover costs of his study leave in 2016.

548 4.8.6 EKD - Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland¹¹
549 The EKD is the organisation to which all protestant regional Churches in Germany
550 are members. It is not the highest authority of these Churches, but the vehicle through
551 which the Churches together do certain tasks, such as be represented in the Bundestag

⁹ <https://www.elm-mission.net/startseite.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.velkd.de/>

¹¹ <https://www.ekd.de/>

552 (Government), or develop Hymn books (the German “Evangelisches Gesangbuch”)
553 and other material.
554 For us the EKD is significant in two areas. The German Churches have tasked the
555 EKD to run the exchange program of vicars and pastors. The EKD itself does not
556 have pastors or vicars, but facilitates between us and the sending Churches and
557 carries the costs in Germany as well as part of the transfer costs for secondments. It
558 arranges meetings for the exchange pastors on an annual basis. Rev Klaus Burckhardt
559 is the person in charge of the African Region of their work.
560 Furthermore the EKD supports the work of our Church with an annual grant,
561 currently 81 000€. The impact of this grant can be seen in the finance report. Also it
562 financially supports some study leaves and further training in Germany.
563 In March 2018 the council of the EKD will visit the UELCSA Churches. They will
564 be in Johannesburg and Pretoria from 6 to 8 March where they will meet some of our
565 pastors, Church Council and congregation members before going to Cape Town and
566 Namibia.

567 4.8.7 LWF - Lutheran World Federation¹²
568 This year saw the General Assembly of the LWF taking place in Windhoek. This
569 event takes place every six to eight years. Our sister Churches in Namibia, especially
570 the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, did an excellent job hosting us. A
571 highlight was the Sunday service in the Sport Stadium in Katatura. This service was
572 attended by thousands of worshippers from Namibia and South Africa, and, of
573 course, by the participants of the Assembly.

574 5 Report back from previous synod
575 Matters that were discussed at the previous synod and not yet finalised are:
576 The revision of the Order of Church Life. With the ending of the merger discussions
577 with the ELCSA (Cape Church) a task team has been formed to bring this up to date.
578 Reformation commemoration stamp: This was investigated and we were informed
579 that such a commemoration stamp by the Post Office was not possible.
580 Guide lines for Youth Pastor/youth worker within congregations: Unfortunately there
581 has been no further work done on these since last synod.
582 5.2 During Synod 2015 tensions erupted between Church Council and various delegates.
583 A number of meetings and discussions have taken place since then, where the issues
584 causing the tension were discussed and solutions found. It was a good learning curve
585 for all involved. Thank you for the willingness to engage in open and honest
586 discussion for the benefit of the Church!

587 6 Moving forward
588 6.1 Strengthening congregations
589 When merger with the ELCSA (Cape Church) was negotiated, all parties agreed that
590 the main aim should be to strengthen that part of the Church which matters most: The
591 Congregations. Without Church at grass roots level the other structures are obsolete.
592 It is this approach that also made us realise that a merger at this stage would not be
593 of benefit, or even detrimental to the process of strengthening the congregations that
594 the ELCSA (Cape Church) has embarked on in the last few years.

¹² <https://www.lutheranworld.org/>

595 For us as ELCSA (N-T) the ending of talks means that we now have to focus on how
596 we should proceed with the development and strengthening of our Church and
597 congregations.

598 This growth process can be divided into three areas:

599 I Strengthening the congregations

600 II Development of the pastors

601 III Optimal utilisation of Church wide structures

602 6.1.1 Impact on the post of Program Facilitator

603 When the post of Program Facilitator was decided on in 2011, it was with points I & II
604 above in mind. In 2015, when the merger with the ELCSA (Cape Church) was
605 believed to be imminent, Church Council decided to only appoint Dr D Tönsing on
606 a half post for two years, to focus on the Reformation Jubilee and then look at the
607 post again for the merged Church. Now that the merger is not continuing, Church
608 Council recommends to synod that the Program Facilitator post be kept vacant and
609 not to budget for it for the next two years. During this time we will analyse the impact
610 of the work since 2011 and define a way forward.

611 6.2 Fear not - I have called you by name! - This call from Isaiah 43 comes at an
612 inconvenient time. Three, even four generations of Israelites have settled in Babylon.
613 Some had totally assimilated with the local population, others had found their niche
614 and existed in harmony. Only very few kept the dream of the promised land alive.
615 Into this situation God calls: It is time to get up and go and live the dream!
616 One can imagine the horror on the faces of those who no longer shared the dream.
617 Why? Why disturb the peace, why get unsettled, and for what? Leave all this behind
618 to go to a run down and impoverished land? We have found our niche, have settled
619 in. Don't disturb us now!

620 Many recall the horror stories that their grand- and great-grand parents told about the
621 journey to Babylon - the unending treck through vast stretches of grass land, the
622 horror of being caught in grass fires, with nowhere to flee. Then there were the river
623 crossings, massive rivers, where many old and young drowned. Please, Lord, spare
624 us this trauma, let us remain here in Babylon. Let it be!

625 The words of the prophet address these fears. When you go through fire, you will not
626 be scorched, when you go through rivers, you will not drown. The dangers are still
627 there - but there also is a promise: I will protect you!

628 Our Church is journeying through difficult times. As we approach the 2019 general
629 elections, it is not clear whether the political climate is going to erupt into violence.
630 Already politicians are being murdered on an all to frequent basis. Election - the time
631 for empty promises and hate speech is coming. Add to that the challenging
632 economical climate with growing unemployment and an economy with Junk status.
633 What shall we do? Withdraw into our safe spaces? Assimilate? Be part of the
634 problem?

635 Can we believe that the Lord is not satisfied with the status quo - neither of our
636 Church, nor of the country? Can we imagine that he has plans to move us forward?
637 "I have called you by name" - can we hear that as our own call?

638 "You shall be my witnesses". God is at work to bring all nations into communion
639 with him. In the Old Testament the Israelites are part of this plan.

640 We know from the New Testament that Christ said that all nations should be reached
641 by the gospel and become his disciples (Mt 28, 18-20). He chose the Church to fulfill
642 this role.

643 We believe that ELCSA (N-T) is part of this action of God, that our Church is not
644 meant to be an island. God has called us by name, placed us into communities, so that
645 these will be blessed by our presence and our activities.

646 It is more than being open for the community and welcoming to strangers - it is about
647 us reaching out into the community and becoming the hope for the strangers.

648 More than that, through our work as congregations people should get to know Christ,
649 and learn to live with him, follow him, and become his messengers as well.

650 Our Church has been shrinking. Our task is not to grow the Church, but to fulfill our
651 calling, to go where God wants us to be. The growth will take care of itself.

652 The road is not without fire and flood, but it is a road with a promise: That the Lord
653 himself is at work, that he guides and protects!

654 "Fear not - I have called you by name" - this is how we start this new synod period.
655 May the next six years be a time of blessing, of amazement at what God is doing, and
656 of courage when fire or flood are threatening us!

657 7 Closing remarks

658 Two members of Church council - President of Synod Wolfgang Fechter and Treasurer
659 of the Church Ron Küsel - have both completed two terms in office and cannot stand for
660 re-election. We thank them for their dedication, not just during the last 12 years, but also
661 in the years before that. Both of them have served in various capacities in their
662 congregations, circuit and Church level. Ron started off as member of the KZN Youth
663 Council in the 1980's and formed part of the Mission Committee Research trip to USA in
664 1993. Wolfgang continues as president of UELCSA synod for the current UELCSA synod
665 period.

666 May both of you continue to be a blessing!

667 Again we also need to thank the office staff, Yolanda Kilian and Liselotte Knöcklein, for
668 their dedication and especially the preparations to get everything ready for synod.
669 To the Hermannsburg congregation and School - thank you for hosting this synod!

670 Horst Müller, Bishop, on behalf of Church Council ELCSA (N-T)