

Overview of the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church – Zululand

Introduction:

The Trinity ELC Zululand congregation, more popularly known as Trinity Zululand, is comprised of four preaching places, or as we call them, centres. The centres are located in Darnall (inland of Zinkwazi), Eshowe, Empangeni and finally in Richards Bay (in the Seafarers Club chapel). The congregation itself is located over a huge area, stretching from about Stanger to St Lucia in the north.

Historical Overview:

The first spark of life for our modern congregation began after the Zulu wars, in 1879 when missionary JH Schmidt bought the farm “Bethesda” on which a quaint, little chapel was built for the Lutheran congregation, Hebron. On the 11th September 1952, the first service was held in Empangeni, which is now the seat of the congregation. In 1958 various Scandinavian missionary groups, together with American missionaries formed the English Eshowe Congregation. On the 1st of Advent, 1965, the Trinity church building in Eshowe, built in a joint venture by the Hebron and Eshowe congregations, was inaugurated for use. In 1980 the Empangeni church building was finished and used for regular services. On the 26th April 1987, the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church Zululand was born after the Hebron and Eshowe congregations merged into one.

Changes:

A major change many congregation members still remember is when the parsonage was moved from Eshowe to Empangeni in May 1997. The congregation made a brave decision to move the parsonage where the growth potential was. Forty years ago, the congregation reached a total of 181 members, many of whom were in Eshowe, however, after the parsonage moved to Empangeni, things changed. This, in conjunction with many factors, led to the Eshowe centre declining in numbers to the point that today, an average of 8 people attend Sunday services. The congregation in Empangeni however, began to grow.

Another change the congregation has experienced is the advent of German services in Richards Bay. The first German service was held on the 10th of June, 2001 in the chapel of the Richards Bay Seafarers’ Club and is still held there to this day.

Another change the congregation has experienced is that it has become a rich collection of many races and cultures. Through the years the congregation has moved in and out of close relationships with the neighbouring ELCSA congregations but it always strives towards unity with our sister congregations.

In the last few years, the congregation has experienced a difficult time, in which many activities, congregational events and morale diminished to the point that only the Sunday Services, Sunday school in Empangeni, a German Fellowship Group, and a small Women’s Fellowship remained.

Today, the Sunday School at Empangeni is regular and supported by a strong Sunday School team, with seemingly more and more children coming every other Sunday. There are also regular Sunday School lessons offered at Darnall and Eshowe (whenever there are children).

In addition to the Women’s Fellowship growing in strength and support, we are proud to report the commencement of confirmation classes in Darnall and in Empangeni, with a total of 9 confirmands committing to the class. This is a big group for a congregation of about 150!

Today, we have English services in Darnall, Eshowe, and in Empangeni. We have German services in Richards Bay and one in Empangeni on every 5th Sunday of a month.

Challenges:

Unity – One of the biggest challenges the congregation faces is unity. The congregation covers a huge area and is thus spread out. In addition to the geographical dispersion, the reality of four preaching centres contributes to the situation that people do not know people in the other centres. Nor do people really emphasise being a part of the bigger church. Becoming one family is one of the most important challenges for this congregation.

Growth – As a small congregation, we are currently not financially viable. The last few years have seen the growth of the congregation practically reduced. Diminishing and ultimately disappearing is a fear at the back of the minds for some in the congregation, but it is unwarranted, especially, when one looks at the congregation as a whole and not at each individual centre.

Other challenges are to restart vital congregational events, such as Bible Study Groups as well as Youth and Senior's Ministries, to mention a few.

With great challenge, comes great opportunity, especially when God is the one guiding and pushing, supporting and uplifting. One of the great strengths of this congregation, is the casual atmosphere that exists in the congregation, which exists, because the congregation is like a family to many, a place of support, companionship, care and one in which they are challenged to grow.

Eshowe – A great challenge for the future, is what is going to happen in Eshowe. The centre in Eshowe needs some real prayer and guidance in this time of decision.

Physical Address of the Church:

Darnall – Bethesda Farm in Darnall

Eshowe – Dickens Street, Eshowe

Empangeni – President Swart Avenue, Empangeni

Richards Bay – Seafarers Club in Richards Bay

Legal seat of the Congregation - 14 Willow Way, Empangeni, 3880 (parsonage)

Contact Details:

Website: www.trinityzululand.wordpress.com

Pastor Rolf Schmidt – 035 772 3702, 082 321 2358, trinity@elcsant.org.za, PO BOX 10336, Empangeni 3880.

Chariperson: Heino Filter – 035 753 3932, 073 905 7467, heinofilter@gmail.com

Service Times:

Darnall – 1st Sunday of the Month 8am Pastor. 3rd Sunday of the Month Lay-Reader service

Eshowe – 2nd Sunday of the Month 8am Pastor. 4th Sunday of the Month Pastor, Service.

Empangeni – Service at 10am every Sunday Pastor present except for the 1st Sunday of every month. 5th Sunday of the month 8:30am German HC service

Richards Bay – German Services will be on the 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month as of October 2011. Pastor present.