

Word of Greeting

The first sitting of the 7th Synod of the ELCSA (N-T) took place in Hermannsburg from 14 to 17 September 2017. We greet you all in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What do we fear today in South Africa, as a church, as congregations and as individuals? Is it the political uncertainty we live in? The violence, discrimination, poverty and inequality, is it the change that is taking place in our church, the cultural diversity, shrinking numbers, the possible changes in terms of language and traditions? Or is it the fear of not being accepted, financial pressure, and conflict within the family, drought, flooding or fire? What effect do these fears have on us? Do we withdraw from the world; seek refuge behind the walls of our houses and churches? It is exactly into this situation that God speaks to us through his prophet Isaiah, saying: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you and when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned." (Isaiah 43:1-2)

Fear not, I have called you by name, you are mine. That was the theme of this year's Synod, which was introduced by an inspiring sermon held by a lay member of Synod, Mr Johann Engelbrecht, during the opening service. Here God promises us that He will lead us through the turbulent times which we currently find ourselves in, and in trusting these promises we become open to God's action in our lives, thereby shifting our focus away from ourselves towards God. Thus, let us listen to what God is calling us to do. Let us trust God's promises, God's unconditional love and acceptance revealed through his Son, Jesus Christ, and let us be agents of change and beacons of hope in this world of ours.

In the business of synod we deliberated and decided on matters concerning the administration and life of our church, including church laws and the budget. We received and debated reports from Church Council and the works, commissions and institutions of our church.

Synod ratified Church Council's decision to enter into a cooperation agreement with the German Seafarers' Mission. Pastor Ron Küsel was inducted, as the new chaplain on Sunday 17 September 2017, by Bishop Horst Müller and Pastor Heike Proske, General Secretary of the German Seafarers' Mission. Pastor Küsel will in parallel investigate the feasibility of a new congregation in the greater Durban area.

Synod is also a very important part of the spiritual life of our church and a great deal of time was also devoted to bible study and group discussions. The synod keynote address was titled "Reformation: It is still all about Jesus". Time was also allocated to a rich and varied panel and group discussion on the top 4 topics derived from the

theses submitted by congregations in the Bishop's Reformation Challenge. These related to poverty/inequality; multicultural challenges; church unity; and the pressures and demands of modern society.

Mr Henning Springer was elected as president of synod to succeed Mr Wolfgang Fechter, with Mr Heino Küsel as deputy (alternate Ms Tshinyi Magoro). Mr Vernon Filter was elected as Treasurer (alternate Ms Carmen Westermeyer). Pastor Petra Röhrs was re-elected as ordained member of Church Council (alternate Pastor Udo Lütge). The following pastors were elected as Deans.

- Pastor Theo Jäckel of Northern Circuit (deputy Pastor Dr Detlev Tönsing)
- Pastor Remo Köhne from Central Circuit (no deputy)
- Pastor Hugo Filter of Eastern Circuit (deputy Pastor Mark Meier)
- Pastor Dirk Köstlin from Southern Circuit (deputy Pastor Manfred Müller-Nedebock).

Greetings were received from Dr Barry Tolmay from the DRC, Pastor Heike Proske from the German Seafarers' Mission, Dr David Tswaedi Executive Director from LUCSA, Bishop Burgert Brand from ELCIN (GELC) and chair of UELCSA, Bishop Gilbert Filter ELCSA (Cape Church), Pastor Dr Joe Lüdemann from the ELM, Rev Thulani Ndlazi from the Church Unity Commission and Bishop Dr Dieter Reinstorf from the FELSISA. The conciliatory message from Bishop Reinstorf was very well received. In addition written greetings were received from the EKD, VELKD, LWF, our previous Bishop Dieter Lilje and Pastor Georg Scriba.

The closing service reinforced the message "You are my witnesses" to Synod and by extension to all our congregations.