



Bishop's Post

October November 2020

Each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3, 10&11

The young church was struggling to find its feet. The first major Apostles' Council had happened just four years earlier. After much and intense debate it came to the conclusion that non-Jews did not have to first become Jews in order to be Christians. What seems obvious to us, was new territory then. They had to realise that Jesus Christ sets people free completely. There was no need for additional steps such as circumcision or adherence to food laws. Whoever entrust themselves to Christ as Saviour is part of the Church. Jesus Christ is the foundation, the only foundation on which we stand!

Paul summarizes this important statement in verse 11. He then also states that we need to take care, how we are building on this foundation.

The rest of the letter, and most other New Testament letters, tell us about this building process - how difficult it was for the young Church to build and agree how to build. Co-workers saw each other as competition, and their supporters even disqualified their opponents as legitimate Christians. (The first chapters of 1 Corinthians speak to this).

Although it was clear that Christ saves, and does so completely, the discussion on what it meant to live as Christian, was a heated one. Which behaviour is allowed, which not? The young church was discovering what it means to be Church.

The Corona crisis had a massive impact on Church today. For months we could not meet at church, or only in small numbers. Counselling had to be done virtually, Memorial services could only take place with very small groups - no hugging to comfort.

Our General Pastors' Convention met (virtually) to discuss the theme "Discovering Church in the New Normal". The past few months have forced us to discover new ways of being Church, but also made us very much aware of what is missing. During the open evening members from congregations could share their observations and experiences. Many shared how they had a new look at Church, faith and at what is important, and what not.

The words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 3 are so relevant, reminding us that the foundation stands solid: Jesus Christ is our saviour to whom we as Christians

all belong. Now we are discovering anew, how to build on this foundation. Paul speaks about “gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw”. Although one is tempted to turn these into value judgements, the reality is that all of these were important building materials in the time of Paul. Hay was important for brick making, and as insulation. Straw was common as roofing material. Wood, even today, is used all over. Gold, silver and precious stones were used sparingly. A golden floor would quickly deplete the building fund!

Of course, wood, hay and straw needed to be replaced frequently, other material was more durable. So, Paul’s caution to build with care makes complete sense. The Corona crisis is an ideal time for us to reflect on how we are building on the foundation. Where have we been wasting precious time, money and energy on unimportant matters? Which things need to be replaced? What new things have we learnt? Some of it will be wood or straw: Important, but not long lasting. Others will turn out to be gems that can have a long-lasting impact on Church.

We are living in a crisis. It is also a fascinating opportunity to try new things and different approaches. We need to build with courage and care. All the time we need to ensure that indeed we are building on the foundation, and not next to it! And we can rest assured that, no matter what, this foundation will not fail. We are Church of Jesus Christ!

Horst Müller

News from the Church

Augsburg congregation has elected **Pastor Dr Reiner Focke** as successor to Pastor Frank Schütte. This means that the pastor’s post of **Trinity Zululand** will become vacant early in 2021. It is not yet clear how this post will be filled. We wish the Focke family strength and blessing for the time of change that awaits them!

Pastor Jochen Volker has accepted a call to Switzerland, and plans to relocate there in November this year. We wish him and his wife Yvonne strength and blessings for this move. Thank you to Pastor Volker for his many years of service in congregation and church.

The **Westrand** congregational council is currently looking at how and in which way the pastor’s post is to be continued.

Vacancies and financial constraints force us to look at different ways of ministry. What happens when congregations cannot afford a full pastor’s post? Where can posts be shared? Should we consider an “E-pastor” who in a combination of virtual and physical presence cares for a number of congregations who together carry the cost of a full post? These are options that congregations and Church Council are considering at the moment. May the Lord of the Church help us to discover His way forward!