

Bishops' Post

This is the first bishops post that I am writing since my election at the synod of 2022. I thank you, for the trust placed in me and ask for your prayers for my office.

Since the synod and until the end of January 2022 there have been two bishops in the NELCSA, Horst Müller as the outgoing and me as the incoming. I thank bishop Müller for his service as bishop of the NELCSA and for his guidance in the last three months.

In the last three months I have often been asked what my aims for the NELCSA are. My answer has remained the same. For the first period of my office, I wish to listen, observe, and learn. It is a privilege to be part of this diverse and vibrant body of Christ called the NELCSA and I hope to meet many of you in the coming months to hear about your situation, views and hopes for our church. May God grant us a journey together that is guided by his Holy Spirit and has the foundation of the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The watchword for the year 2023 is found in the book of Genesis, chapter 16, verse 13: “**You are the God who sees me.**” (NIV Translation)

God, who sees me! There are times in all our lives when we feel the opposite. We feel that God does not see and is not in control. Others control our lives, our country, and our destiny. In times of load shedding and an uncertain future in many ways it is easy to become despondent and to lose hope.

And yet we have hope. God sees each one of us!

The words of our watchword for 2023 come from Hagar, a woman who is not as well-known as other figures in the Bible. The name Hagar means “flight” or “foreigner.” For many people, her name represents the plight of foreigners, slaves, and sexually abused women. She is the slave of Sarai, the wife of Abraham. God promised Abraham a son, but when Sarai fails to get pregnant, she “gives” Hagar to Abraham for her to get pregnant. Hagar becomes pregnant but the pregnancy creates a conflict between the women. The tension becomes so bad that Hagar flees into the desert.

A hopeless situation. A woman at the mercy of others and seen by many as worthless and forsaken.

You are the God who sees me.

In the desert God sends his messenger – his angel to Hagar. He addresses her by her name and restores her dignity to her. The woman who had been dominated and commanded over all her life gets asked by the angel, “*Where have you come from? Where are you going?*” (Genesis 16.8)

Hagar becomes the first woman in the Bible whom God addresses personally through his messenger and the first woman to receive a comprehensive promise of blessing: “*The angel continued, ‘I will give you and your family many children. There will be more of them than anyone can count.’ 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her, ‘You are now pregnant and will have a son. You will name him Ishmael because the LORD has heard about your suffering.*” Genesis 16, 10+11)

The story of Hagar does not have a fairy-tale ending. She goes back to Sarai and is later sent away again. And yet Hagar, the forsaken or “foreign” one meets God and realizes that he not only sees her but remains in control of her life and situation. This causes her to confess her faith and give God a name and a description: “*She gave a name to the LORD who spoke to her. She called him ‘You are the God who sees me.’ That’s because she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me.’*” (Genesis 16,13)

Hagar realises that God sees her and hears her and listens to her cries for help. So that she should never forget this, she gives her son the name Ishmael, which means: God hears.

There are times in all our lives when we feel that God does not see and is not in control. God sees us and God hears us. This message that the watchword for 2023 gives us wants to give us hope and peace. We are not alone – God is the God who sees me!

Theo Jäckel

News from the NELCSA

1. Pastor Gottfried Drüsedau passed away in Stralsund, Germany on the 2nd of December 2022 at the age of 92. Pastor Drüsedau had worked as a pastor in St Peter's Pretoria congregation for many years.
2. Pastor Randolph Kassier was inducted into the Braunschweig congregation on the 22nd of January 2023.
3. Bishop Theo Jäckel had his farewell from the congregation Kroondal and moved to Pretoria on the 1st of February 2023.
4. Our theology student Hermann Düvel will write his first theological exam on the 2nd of February 2023. We wish him God's guidance.
5. All congregations are requested to elect new synod representatives for the new period of synod beginning in 2023. An e-mail in this regard has been sent to the congregations.
6. In January and February delegations from the Evangelical Church of Germany and the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Niedersachsen (ELM) will be visiting our church. We are thankful for the partnerships that we have with these bodies.
7. The new church office of the NELCSA will be situated at 570 Witogie Street, Die Wilgers, Pretoria from February 2023. Please feel free to visit your church office should you be in the area.