



BISHOPS POST



What is a “Lutheran Congregation”? For decades we had a very narrow view on this: A Lutheran service is according to a set liturgical agenda (Agenda 1), conducted by a pastor wearing a black gown, and, if available, accompanied by an organ. A Lutheran Church building is simple, non-ornate, the only painting might be behind the altar. The altar has a crucifix (cross with the body of Jesus on it), two candles and a Bible. Or is it an empty cross and six candles?

The irony is that up to the early 1800’s the Lutheran Church encompassed an enormous variety. King Frederick William III of Prussia wanted to create uniformity from this diversity, not only amongst Lutherans, but amongst all protestant Churches in his domain. Some of his reforms led to a split in the Lutheran Church, but many were widely accepted, even by those who split. By 1850 many of these reforms had become the norm for Lutherans. Since most of our congregations were founded after 1850, they applied those principles. Thus we grew up with the notion: This uniformity is Lutheran. Anything extraordinary is not.

Uniformity, however, is not Lutheran. On the contrary - Luther places a huge emphasis on creativity, on proclaiming the gospel in such a way that the people can understand it.

When a pastor asked him for advice on clerical garments, he responded: If necessary, wear three layers - as long as you preach the gospel! To another he replied: God has given you a brain! Use it to find out what is the best action in your circumstance! Under all circumstances find the best way of proclaiming the gospel! With that Luther touches on one of the most important aspects of our Christian Faith - the LIVING Word.

“The Word became flesh and dwelled amongst us” is how the gospel of John starts the good news of Jesus Christ. (Jn1,14) The Living Word can not be confined to set rules and regulations, but “dwells among us”, moves among us. When Jesus Christ called people to follow, he did not supply them with a handbook, but with a commission: Go, make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. This “all I have commanded you” is not a set rule book, but the command to love, focussed towards God, one self and the neighbour.

Paul sums this up when he states: To the Jews I have become a Jew, to the Greeks a Greek, to the gentiles a gentile - all for the sake of winning some for Christ. (1 Cor 9,19ff)

What is a Lutheran Congregation? It is a congregation that is focussed on sharing the good news of Christ, in word and deed, in its environment, to the people where God has placed it. Our uniformity does not lie in our methods, but in our goal - to creatively and relevantly spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Your co-worker in Christ,

Horst Müller

News from the Church

We rejoice with **Pastor Rolf and Jessica Schmidt on the birth of their healthy daughter Anna** on 17th May. Unfortunately Jessica had to be re-admitted to hospital with thrombosis, but is recovering with treatment. Please remember her in your prayers.

The **Johannes congregation** in Pretoria has elected **Pastor Dr. Christian Nottmeier** as their new pastor. He is seconded by the EKD and will start on 1st October 2012.

The **Friedenskirche in Hillbrow** has elected Pastor Dr. Lutz Ackermann as their new pastor. He will commence his service there as soon as possible. Both pastors will be introduced to you once they have started. I thank God that he has sent these “workers into the harvest”. Let us pray that they will have a good start, and that the families will settle in well!

Vicar **H-P von Fintel** has returned from Germany. If he passes his second theological examination on 1 and 2 August, he will start his coll-time in King Williamstown (Cape Church).

Vicar **Frank Schütte** has completed his internship in Walvis Bay, Namibia. During July and August he will be in St Peters, Pretoria before leaving for the next leg of his internship in Döblen, Saxony, Germany at the end of August.