



BISHOP'S

June 15 POST July 15



In the previous Bishop's Post I shared about my visit to Ethiopia. "Our congregations know why they exist" the Church leader had stated. I asked myself: Do our congregations know why, for what purpose they exist?

When I was a dean I regularly led visitations to congregations. I specifically remember one instance. The congregational council was despondent. Most members had moved away. How can we survive? -was their question.

We decided to go for a walk around the area of the church. We saw many people living there, children playing in the yards, on the street - a hustle and bustle. There were no members living close by - but many, many others. We agreed that, should another denomination rent the church building, it was most likely that it would soon be too small for them.

Why do most of our congregations not succeed in inviting new people? Or, let me re-formulate: Why do many Lutherans not think of inviting others into their congregation? It is not the congregation that invites, but the people!

I am reminded of an instance during my first few years of ministry. I met a congregant at a shop. After chatting a while, I greeted him "See you on Sunday" (they were regular service attenders). "No, we won't be coming on Sunday. We have visitors for the weekend" "Why don't you bring them along?" I asked. From the facial expression I could see that this thought had never crossed his mind.

Why is that? Do we just assume that our services and our congregation are not interesting to outsiders? Do we regard it as "irresponsible" to expose visitors to our services? Or are we indeed so busy with things that are irrelevant to outsiders?

Why does your congregation exist? In Matthew 5,14 Jesus speaks about us as "light of the world". A city on a mountain cannot stay hidden, he says.

I encourage you to take a walk or a drive around the area surrounding your church. Do it with this prayer at heart: "Lord, why are we here? We have a wonderful gospel to share. Where should it shine?"

With kind regards,

Horst Müller

News from the Church:

1. On 31 January 2015 **Magdalene Böhmer** passed away, aged 92. She was the widow of Pastor Herbert Böhmer. After their retirement the couple became active in St Peters Pretoria and served the congregation for many years, helping out wherever they could.

On 15 April 2015 **Anne Holsten** passed away, aged 93. She was the widow of Missionary Heinrich Holsten, who for many years was based in GaRankuwa, and from there established various ELCSA congregations around Pretoria. His Setswana songs are still sung in the region. After their retirement they too became active in St Peters Pretoria, especially helping out with services in the Old Age Home.

We pray that the relatives will be comforted. Thanks be to God for these people that were a blessing to so many of us.

2. Pastor emeritus Albrecht Hahne passed away on 28 April. His funeral service

was on 5 May in the Bellville congregation.

Pastor Hahne was Pastor in Trinity (Eshowe-Hebron), Bethanien, St Peters Pretoria, and Bellville, and during his time in the ELCSA (NT) also the spiritual leader

of the brass band association.

As a young child he contracted leprosy, and suffered from the effects all along. Despite this he was well known for his laughter.

We thank God for the work that he could do in His church.

May God comfort his family, and guide them on the way forward.

3. The preparations for our **Synod** from 15-18 October in Kroondal are in full swing. The topic is “**Unity in diversity**”. The times when we were a homogenous Church are long gone. Even congregations working in only one language experience quite a variety of traditions amongst their membership. This often leads to immense tensions. Yet, such variety is also a blessing, because it shows that there is life.

Please pray that the preparations may be blessed.