



## **Report by Church Council to Synod 2025**

### **Rooted and Re-Forming.**



5 **“Test everything; hold fast to what is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)**

6

7 **Introduction: Living in a Time of Change**

8 We are living in an age of rapid and constant change. The pace at which our world evolves  
9 demands that we be more flexible and adaptable than ever before. Every day, we are  
10 bombarded with information, ideas, and offers. The result is a constant pressure to discern, to  
11 choose, and to decide what to accept and what to reject. Our lives are filled with decisions,  
12 big and small, and the number of choices we face continues to grow.

13 At the same time, many people feel overwhelmed and lost amid the complexity of this fast-  
14 changing world. Around us, we see the rise of extreme political views offering simplistic  
15 answers to complex issues—both globally and here in South Africa. Long-held values are  
16 questioned, and little feels secure. What was once certain may now feel outdated or even  
17 controversial, leading to a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

18 **Change Within Our Church**

19 Change is not only happening in the world around us; it is happening within our church as well.  
20 When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (N-T) was established in 1981, it  
21 consisted of 42 congregations—40 of which were German-speaking, with only two primarily  
22 using English. At that time, 30 of the pastors were from Germany, sent by the Evangelical  
23 Lutheran Mission (ELM) or Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), while only five were South  
24 African. The congregations were almost entirely white and German-speaking.

25 Today, we see a very different picture. NELCSA now has 31 congregations served by 22  
26 pastors—20 of whom are South African, with only two still sent by the EKD. Nearly all our  
27 congregations now also offer services in languages other than German. Our church has  
28 become a vibrant, multicultural community that reflects the diversity of South Africa. We are  
29 deeply thankful to God for this transformation and for guiding us through it.

30 In the early days, our church structures mirrored those of the German church, with the  
31 expectation that each congregation would have its own full-time pastor—or at most, share one  
32 between two or three congregations. While this model still works for many congregations, we  
33 are increasingly encountering contexts that no longer fit this traditional framework.

34 Thanks to responsible stewardship by our congregations, the financial debt of our  
35 congregations has been significantly reduced over the past two years, as the Treasurer’s  
36 Report will detail. We are grateful to all who contributed to this achievement. However, we  
37 must also face a hard truth: more and more congregations can no longer support a full-time  
38 pastor. As a result, we now have four congregations led by laypeople and four served with  
39 interim measures.

40 As the Church Council, we recognize this as a key challenge in a changing world. We do not  
41 believe that congregations should be closed simply because they no longer fit the traditional  
42 model. Rather, we are committed to rethinking and restructuring the church’s framework.  
43 Structural change is necessary and inevitable. We are thankful to the Structures and Models  
44 Team for their important work in this area.

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## 48 **Rooted and Re-Forming: Holding Fast to What Is Good**

49 In 1 Thessalonians 5:21, Paul encourages the early church to “test everything; hold fast to  
50 what is good.” Paul’s words were directed to a young Christian community in Thessalonica,  
51 urging them to remain strong in their faith and to await Christ’s return with joyful anticipation.  
52 In that context—and ours—Paul offers wise counsel for Christian living: rejoice always, pray  
53 continually, give thanks, and critically discern what is true and good and according to the  
54 gospel – and hold onto it.

55 This guidance is just as relevant for us today. The symbol of this Synod is a tree—a powerful  
56 image of what it means to be both rooted and reforming. A healthy tree grows and adapts with  
57 the seasons, yet it stands firm because its roots run deep. Likewise, the church thrives when  
58 it remains grounded in God’s unchanging truth while growing in response to the needs of the  
59 time.

60 The roots of the tree symbolize the unchanging message of the Gospel: the love, grace, and  
61 truth of God. These are our foundations. Without deep roots in Christ, we lose our grounding  
62 and our witness. But when we are firmly rooted, we are equipped to branch out, to bear fruit,  
63 and to engage with the world courageously and faithfully.

64 The church is called to adapt and discover new ways to serve, yet the Gospel remains our  
65 constant foundation. Relevance in today’s world does not require altering our core message.  
66 Our mission is, and always will be, to proclaim Jesus Christ and His message—yesterday,  
67 today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). We believe in a living God who continues to act in history  
68 and speaks into the evolving challenges of each generation. To be rooted in faith does not  
69 mean standing still; it means engaging today’s questions with the timeless truth of the Gospel.

70 In preparation for this Synod, congregations were invited to create “leaves” and “roots” for a  
71 symbolic tree as a way to reflect on the roots that give them strength and continuity. They were  
72 also encouraged to consider the changes they have experienced—and are still undergoing—  
73 and to recognize the fruit borne by the Holy Spirit. This process affirms our identity as a church  
74 that is deeply grounded yet open to transformation.

75 In doing so, we are equipped to face the complexities of our time with courage and faith. When  
76 we are secure in our roots, we can look at the world through the lens of Christ’s grace and  
77 love, and ask—both humbly and boldly: “What does Jesus inspire us to do in this moment?”

78 The church remains relevant when it is firmly anchored in Jesus Christ and responsive to the  
79 movement of the Holy Spirit. As long as we hold fast to the Gospel and extend love to those  
80 around us, the church will continue to shine as a light in the darkness and a beacon of hope—  
81 for this generation and the ones yet to come.

## 82 **Deaths**

83 With deep sorrow, we share the news of the passing of several beloved members of our wider  
84 church community:

85 Pastor Gottfried Drüsedau passed away on 2 December 2022, in Stralsund, Germany, at the  
86 age of 92. He served faithfully for many years as a pastor in the St. Peters congregation,  
87 leaving a legacy of devotion and care.

88 Pastor Herbert Seinwill passed away on 12 August 2023. He served in various congregations  
89 of the then ELCSA (N-T) with faithfulness and dedication. His pastoral care, teaching, and  
90 quiet strength left a lasting mark on the lives of many. We give thanks for his ministry and  
91 remember his family and all who grieve his loss

92

93 Karen Harms, wife of Pastor Dieter Harms—who served our church for many years—passed  
94 away on 6 February 2024, in Germany. We hold Dieter and his family in our prayers, asking  
95 for God’s comfort and peace in this time of grief.

96 Monika Wittenberg, widow of Prof. Dr. Gunther Wittenberg, passed away on 25 May 2024.  
 97 She was a committed and active member of the church, deeply engaged in theological  
 98 education and the formation of future church leaders. Her faith, insight, and dedication to  
 99 Christian service left a profound impact on many. We give thanks for her life and hold her  
 100 family in our prayers.

101 Ernst-August Lüdemann, former director of the ELM, passed away on 28 December 2024. His  
 102 vision, leadership, and deep commitment to mission work touched many lives. We give thanks  
 103 for his lasting contributions and consider all who mourn his passing.

104 May God's presence bring comfort to their families and to all who grieve. We remember them  
 105 with gratitude and entrust them to God's eternal care.

## 106 **Pastoral Changes in Congregations**

### 107 **1. Farewell and New Beginnings in Ministry**

108 We bid a fond farewell to Pastor Nicole Otte-Kempf, who, together with her husband Carsten  
 109 and their two children, returned to Germany in August 2024. We are deeply grateful for her  
 110 faithful service and the many gifts she shared during her time with us.

111 We also acknowledge Pastor Rosalie Madika, who relocated to Canada. Pastor Madika  
 112 served faithfully in the church's Refugee and Migrant Ministry, where her compassion,  
 113 strength, and pastoral care touched many lives. While she is no longer with us geographically,  
 114 she remains close to our hearts, and we give thanks for her ongoing ministry and witness in  
 115 her new context.

### 116 **Pastoral Appointments, Transitions, and Acknowledgements**

117 We are pleased to share several recent pastoral appointments and transitions within our  
 118 church, reflecting both movement and faithful service across our congregations.

119 Pastor Kornelia Schauf began her ministry in the Johannesgemeinde in Pretoria East on 1  
 120 September 2024. Her official induction was celebrated on 27 October 2024.

121 Pastor Martha Weich was inducted at St. Peters-by-the-Lake in Bryanston on 3 November  
 122 2024, where she serves in a 50% capacity.

123 Pastor Dr. Gertrud Tönsing was inducted as pastor of the Vaal Triangle congregation,  
 124 Vanderbijl Park on 9 February 2025.

125 Pastor Elke Carrihill was inducted at the Michaelis congregation in Vryheid on 9 March 2025,  
 126 which has resulted in a vacancy at the Winterton congregation.

127 Pastor Susanne Liechti was inducted on 6 April 2025 at the Kempton Park congregation,  
 128 where she now serves in a part-time (¼ post) capacity.

129 As of January 2025, Pastor Remo Koehne's appointments at both the West Rand Lutheran  
 130 Community Church (WRLCC) and the Wings for Life School in Vanderbijlpark have each  
 131 been increased from 25% to 50%. This transition has created a vacancy at the Church of  
 132 Peace in Hillbrow.

133 Pastor Hermann Düvel successfully completed his second theological examination and has  
 134 been placed in the Kroondal congregation as a pastor on probation. We express sincere  
 135 gratitude to Pastors and former Bishops Reinhard Keding and Horst Müller, for their faithful  
 136 interim service in Kroondal during the vacancy.

137 We also acknowledge with deep appreciation the contributions of several retired pastors who  
 138 have continued to support our congregations in recent years:

139 Pastor Hugo Filter served faithfully in the Trinity Zululand congregation in Empangeni as a  
 140 pensioner until June 2025.

141 Pastor Rudolf Schmid, who served as a pensioner in the United Evangelical Lutheran  
 142 Congregation (UELC) in Wartburg, New Hanover and Harburg, and has now relocated to  
 143 Pretoria.

144 Pastor Charles Paine ministered for many years in the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the  
 145 East Rand (ELCER) congregation in Germiston as a pensioner.

146 Pastor Friedel Lisse served the Vaaltriangle congregation in Vanderbijlpark before relocating  
147 to Namibia at the end of 2024.

148 Pastors Werner Harms and Georg Scriba, both retired, have graciously stepped in to serve  
149 the Winterton congregation during its current pastoral vacancy.

150 We give thanks for the ongoing commitment of all our pastors—both active and retired—who  
151 continue to build up the body of Christ across our congregations. We thank God for each of  
152 these servants and pray for blessings over their ministries and the communities they serve.

## 153 **2. Retirements and Transitions**

154 Pastor Rüdiger Lutz, who served the Michaelis congregation in Vryheid, retired in February  
155 2024. We are deeply thankful for his years of faithful ministry and wish him and his wife, Silke,  
156 a joyful and richly blessed retirement in Pretoria. He is presently helping out in Kempton Park  
157 and St Peter's Pretoria.

158 Bishop Burgert Brand of ELCIN (GELC) retired at the end of 2024. A farewell celebration in  
159 his honour was held on 8 December 2024. We are grateful for his leadership and service over  
160 the years. His successor, Bishop Frank Schütte, assumed office in January 2025.

161 We are also especially thankful for the long and faithful ministry of Pastor Dr. Detlev Tönsing,  
162 who will retire at the end of 2025. His decades of dedicated service have been a true gift to  
163 the church, and we give thanks for the depth, wisdom, and grace he has brought to our  
164 community.

## 165 **3. Congregational Status and Pastoral Appointments**

166 As was the case in many businesses and other areas of society, the time of Covid-19 had a  
167 seriously negative effect on our congregations. However, we are grateful that most  
168 congregations have reported a good recovery and increased attendance again.

169

Year	Number of Congregations	Membership	Average Service Attendance per Sunday
2019	31	8073	2528
2023	29	8048	2119

170

171 Note: The congregations Moorleigh and Lutheran Church Dolphin Coast have closed.

172 Pastoral Employment: In 2019, NELCSA employed 26 pastors. As of 2025, the number of  
173 employed pastors has decreased to 23.

### 174 Pastors Who Have Joined Service (2019-2025):

- 175 • Kornelia Schauf
- 176 • Martha Weich
- 177 • Susanne Liechti
- 178 • Hermann Düvel (Pastor on probation)
- 179 • Friedel Lisse
- 180 • Jessica Schmidt
- 181 • Peter Molchin

182

### 183 Pastors who have left service of NELCSA (2019-2025):

- 184 • Heike Jakubeit
- 185 • Peter Molchin (retired)
- 186 • Dieter Trümpelmann
- 187 • Dieter Klee

- 188 • Horst Müller (retired)
- 189 • Hugo Filter (retired)
- 190 • Rolf Schmidt
- 191 • Jessica Schmidt
- 192 • Jochen Volker
- 193 • Rosalie Madika
- 194 • Rüdiger Lutz (retired)
- 195 • Nicole Otte-Kempf
- 196 • Friedel Lisse (retired)

197

198 A heartfelt thank you to retired pastors Hugo Filter, Werner Harms, Georg Scriba, Rüdiger  
 199 Lutz, Detlef Schwarz, Rudolf Schmid, Reinhard Keding and Horst Müller for assisting in  
 200 congregations with vacant pastors' posts.

#### 201 Pastoral Appointments Since Last Synod

202 Since our last synod two years ago, the following vacancies have been filled, either with a  
 203 100%, 50%, or 25% position:

- 204 • Vryheid – 83 % Congregation 17% ELM
- 205 • Vanderbijlpark – 100%
- 206 • Kroondal – 100%
- 207 • West Rand – 50%
- 208 • St. Peters by the Lake – 50%
- 209 • Kempton Park – 25%

210

#### 211 Congregations Served Through Interim Measures

- 212 • Verden/Dundee (2019) – currently served by Pastor Marlon Hiestermann, FELSISA
- 213 Uelzen congregation

214

215 The following pastors' posts are currently vacant:

- 216 • UELC (June 2023, one of two posts) – Advertising for a pastor
- 217 • Winterton (March 2025) – Currently served by retired Pastors Scriba and Harms
- 218 • Church of Peace – Hillbrow
- 219 • East Rand – Germiston

220

#### 221 Lay-Led Congregations

222 The following congregations operate under lay leadership:

- 223 • Nelspruit
- 224 • Pietersburg
- 225 • Duiwelskloof
- 226 • Trinity Zululand

227

#### 228 **4. Jubilees**

229 As NELCSA we celebrated the following milestones:

230 Verden Congregation: 100 years of their church building (24 September 2024)

231 New Germany Lutheran Church: 175 years of existence (29 October 2024)

232 Augsburg Congregation: 100 years of existence (3 December 2024)

233 Brass Band Association (Posaunenverband) of NELCSA: 100 years of service (9-11 August  
 234 2024, in Hermannsburg)

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236

## 237 **5. eEquip Camp: Strengthening Our NELCSA Family**

238 As NELCSA, we take great pride in being a diverse church, rich in different traditions and  
 239 cultures. Our shared faith unites us, and we strive to create opportunities for all members to  
 240 grow together in Christ. One such opportunity has been the annual eEquip camp, a long-  
 241 standing tradition that has played a crucial role in the spiritual journey of many within our  
 242 church.

243 For many years, the eEquip camp has been held early in the year in Hermannsburg. This retreat  
 244 has provided a dedicated space for individuals and families to start their year equipped under  
 245 the Word of God. A committed and engaged group of people has faithfully attended these  
 246 camps, finding renewal and encouragement in fellowship and reflection.

247  
 248 Following the eEquip camp in 2025, the planning team convened to reflect on the future of this  
 249 cherished event. After careful discussion, it was decided to rethink the retreat to make it more  
 250 accessible to the entire NELCSA community. This decision marks an exciting new chapter for  
 251 eEquip, ensuring that more members can experience the benefits of this gathering.

252  
 253 The following was decided:

- 254 • eEquip will continue to be a retreat for families within NELCSA.
- 255 • It will remain an official camp of the NELCSA church.
- 256 • eEquip will take place every second year, alternating with the NELCSA synod.
- 257 • The venue will rotate across the circuits of NELCSA, ensuring that different regions  
 258 have the opportunity to host and participate.
- 259 • The camp will take place in the second half of the year, making it more accessible for  
 260 families.

261 All families are warmly invited to attend and experience the greater church community by  
 262 connecting with members from various congregations.

263  
 264 The first eEquip camp under this new format will take place in Gauteng from 24-27 September  
 265 2026. We invite everyone to be part of this project, as we come together in faith, fellowship,  
 266 and growth. Mark your calendars and prepare for an enriching experience as we continue to  
 267 strengthen our NELCSA family under God's guidance.

## 268 **6. The Trinity-Zululand congregation**

269 The Trinity-Zululand Congregation has undergone significant developments over the past  
 270 years. Special thanks are due to Pastor Hugo Filter, who has faithfully served the congregation  
 271 as a retired pastor. His dedication and leadership have been invaluable during this transitional  
 272 period.

273 Following numerous discussions, the congregation has made the decision to operate as a lay-  
 274 led congregation for an initial period of two years. This transition will be supported by the larger  
 275 church structure to ensure continued spiritual growth and guidance.

276 We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry and Discipleship (M&D) team representatives,  
 277 the Structures and Models team, the Dean of the Circuit, Pastor Hugo Filter, and the many  
 278 council and congregation members for their hard work and commitment to this process. Their  
 279 efforts have been instrumental in shaping the future of the congregation.

## 280 **7. General Pastors' Convention**

281 The General Pastors' Convention 2024 took place from 26 to 31 May at Padre Pio in Pretoria,  
 282 gathering pastors and interns from across NELCSA under the theme: "Reflecting on the Seeds  
 283 from the Word of God – Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). This biennial  
 284 event serves as a vital space for spiritual renewal, theological reflection, and mutual  
 285 encouragement among our pastors. It also provides a valuable opportunity to engage in  
 286 conversations about the challenges and opportunities facing our congregations today.

287 Through worship, discussion, and strategic planning, pastors were able to reconnect with one  
288 another and with the heart of their calling—grounded in the Word and guided by love.

289 **8. Institutions associated with the Church**

290 **8.1 Deutsche Schule Hermannsburg (DSH) and other congregational schools**

291 The NELCSA Church Council is keenly aware of and deeply appreciates the valuable and  
292 often selfless work being done in the many congregational schools across our church. These  
293 institutions are not merely centres of academic learning but are vital spaces where children  
294 and youth are shaped holistically—spiritually, morally, intellectually, and socially. Rooted in the  
295 Christian faith, these schools play a foundational role in nurturing young minds and hearts,  
296 instilling values of compassion, integrity, and service. Their contribution to both church and  
297 society is profound and lasting.

298 Hermannsburg School stands as one of the oldest institutions of learning in South Africa, with  
299 a proud history spanning almost 170 years. Despite its official name, Deutsche Schule  
300 Hermannsburg, English is the primary medium of instruction, with German offered as a First  
301 Language subject—honouring the school's deep-rooted heritage.

302 Warm congratulations are extended to Ms. Joan Gerber on her appointment as Executive  
303 Head of Hermannsburg School, effective 1 April 2025. Her leadership is expected to bring  
304 renewed vision and energy, reinforcing the school's commitment to academic excellence and  
305 Christian values. We pray that her tenure will be a time of growth and blessing for the entire  
306 school community.

307 We also extend heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Zola Mkumla, the owner of Hermannsburg  
308 School, on being awarded the prestigious Bundesverdienstkreuz (Federal Cross of Merit) by  
309 the German government. This esteemed honour recognises his significant contributions to  
310 education and to preserving German heritage in South Africa.

311 In March 2025, the NELCSA Church Council Executive Committee met with the  
312 Hermannsburg School Board and reaffirmed the importance of continued cooperation through  
313 the placement and financing of a School Pastor (50% post). This renewed partnership reflects  
314 a shared commitment to faith-based education and mutual support between church and  
315 school.

316 **8.2 Lutheran Community Outreach Foundation (LCOF), Hillbrow**

317 We congratulate Mr. Wiseman Ngobese on his appointment as Executive Director of LCOF  
318 and extend our gratitude to Mr. Robert Michel, the outgoing Director, for his dedicated service.

319 LCOF was founded by the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Johannesburg (Church of  
320 Peace), Hillbrow, and is supported by ELCSA Central Diocese and NELCSA. Both bishops  
321 serve as ex officio board members, ensuring a vital connection. The foundation focuses on  
322 skills development, refugee and migrant ministry, and counselling in Hillbrow, Musina, and  
323 Pretoria.

324 LCOF remains committed to empowering communities and fostering sustainable  
325 development.

326 **9. Closer unity and co-operation between Lutheran Churches in South Africa**

327 In the Gospel of John, Jesus prays,  
328 *"That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be*  
329 *in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."* (John 17:21)

330 This verse highlights Christ's deep desire for unity among His followers—a unity that reflects  
331 the perfect relationship between Him and the Father. Jesus did not merely call for outward  
332 agreement but for a spiritual oneness that would serve as a testimony to the world of His  
333 divine mission.

334 Despite the diversity of Christian traditions, theologies, and church structures, all believers  
 335 share a common root: faith in Christ's saving work. Rather than being a source of division, this  
 336 diversity can enrich the global Church, offering multiple perspectives and practices that  
 337 contribute to spiritual growth. Each tradition brings unique strengths that help nurture and  
 338 develop the faith of believers.

339 The Bible calls Christians to build one another up rather than compete or create  
 340 unnecessary divisions. Hebrews 10:24-25 "*Let us consider how we may spur one another*  
 341 *on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of*  
 342 *doing, but encouraging one another,*" reminds us of our duty to encourage, edify, and  
 343 support each other in love. A divided Church weakens its witness, whereas a Church that  
 344 stands united—despite structural and doctrinal differences—becomes a powerful testimony  
 345 to the world of Christ's love and truth.

346 Recognizing this biblical call to unity, the leadership of NELCSA has, over the past two years,  
 347 embarked on a journey towards closer cooperation and deeper unity with other Lutheran  
 348 churches in Southern Africa. This began with renewed engagement with two churches that  
 349 have historically been close to NELCSA, yet where strong differences have also existed in the  
 350 past:

351 The Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA)

352 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA)

353 Through these dialogues, church leaders have sought to strengthen relationships,  
 354 cooperation, and mutual understanding, while still respecting theological and structural  
 355 differences.

356

### 357 **9.1 Cooperation between NELCSA and FELSISA**

358 The relationship between NELCSA and FELSISA has long been characterized by deep  
 359 personal and community connections. Many members of both churches share family ties,  
 360 business relationships, and friendships. There are some regions where cooperation exists on  
 361 various levels.

362 As churches, we acknowledge our theological differences while also affirming our unity in  
 363 Christ. While remaining two distinct church bodies, we are committed to strengthening mutual  
 364 understanding and exploring areas of possible collaboration.

365 For some time, a small group of theologians from both churches has been engaged in  
 366 discussions on the theological positions of NELCSA and FELSISA. Their task has been to  
 367 explore points of agreement and divergence.

368 Building upon this foundation, two official meetings have taken place over the past two years  
 369 between the Church Council of NELCSA and the Synodal Council of FELSISA. These  
 370 meetings were marked by an open and respectful atmosphere.

371 As a further step in this journey of dialogue and hopefully better understanding, it is envisioned  
 372 that a joint document will be developed and published by the Church Councils of NELCSA and  
 373 FELSISA. This document will outline both the theological and practical similarities and  
 374 differences between our churches. Its aim is not only to clarify our respective positions but  
 375 also to foster transparency.

376 We hope that these discussions will lead to a strong and constructive relationship between  
 377 our churches, allowing us to learn with and from one another. Both NELCSA and FELSISA  
 378 emphasize the importance of talking with one another rather than about one another, ensuring  
 379 that our dialogue remains grounded in mutual respect and Christian love.

380

381

382           9.2    **Dialogue for closer unity with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in**  
 383           **Southern Africa (ELCSA)**

384   Following the NELCSA Synod session three years ago, both NELCSA and the ELCSA (Cape  
 385   Church) were approached by ELCSA leadership to discuss greater cooperation and closer  
 386   unity between the churches. This led to six meetings between the bishops, all of which were  
 387   marked by a sincere desire to understand each other better and explore opportunities for  
 388   collaboration.

389   We discussed areas of practical cooperation, including:

- 390       • Joint projects at the local level, such as pastors' conventions and joint services where  
 391       possible.
- 392       • Exchange and participation in key church events, including invitations to each other's  
 393       synods and other gatherings.
- 394       • A shared witness to Christ, while acknowledging our differences in church structures—  
 395       ELCSA follows an episcopal structure, whereas NELCSA and ELCSA (Cape Church)  
 396       operate with a congregational structure.

397   Although our histories and organizational frameworks differ, we remain part of the one body  
 398   of Christ, called to unity in faith and mission.

399   To further strengthen this cooperation, the church councils of NELCSA and ELCSA agreed to  
 400   meet—a practice that had existed in the past but had been abandoned. A joint meeting of the  
 401   three Church Councils took place on 9-10 February 2025, which proved to be a fruitful  
 402   gathering. Here, church leaders deepened relationships, shared insights into their respective  
 403   churches, and discussed practical ways to enhance cooperation.

404   As this process continues, we intend to extend invitations to other Lutheran churches across  
 405   South Africa and the wider region. Some of these churches are:

- 406       • The Moravian Church in Southern Africa
- 407       • The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana (ELCB)
- 408       • The Reformed Lutheran Church (RELUCSA)
- 409       • The United Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ULCSA)
- 410       • The Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA)
- 411       • The Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA)
- 412       • The Bapedi Lutheran Church
- 413       • The Liberating Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (LELCSA)
- 414       • The Bafokeng Lutheran Church

415  
 416   The Declaration of Intent, adopted by representatives of ELCSA, NELCSA and ELCSA  
 417   (Cape Church) in Bonaero Park, Kempton Park on 23 August 2023, calls our attention to the  
 418   issue of unity within diversity. Rooted firmly in the gospel imperative to be one body in Christ  
 419   (John 17:21; 1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:4), this declaration invites us to reimagine  
 420   what Christian unity means for our context.

421  
 422   We present the declaration here in full:

423  
 424   **Declaration of Intent - Bonaero Park, Kempton Park, 23 August 2023**

425  
 426       *Inspired by the gospel imperative and a call to be one body (John 17:21; 1 Corinthians*  
 427       *12:12; Ephesians 4:4)*

428       *United by common Christian faith and the adherence to a common Lutheran doctrine as*  
 429       *espoused in the confessional writings:*

430

- 431 • *We recognise the challenge of woundedness caused by historical events and*
- 432 *persistent divisions.*
- 433 • *We acknowledge and embrace diversity in structure and church governance.*
- 434 • *We acknowledge previous attempts at attaining unity among Lutheran churches in*
- 435 *South Africa.*
- 436 • *We express the desire to bring about unity within the diversity of various Lutheran*
- 437 *churches based in South Africa in order to bring a common witness to the Gospel.*
- 438 • *We endeavour to promote healing, communication and cohesion among the various*
- 439 *Lutheran churches in South Africa*
- 440 *in order to facilitate unity, cooperation and solidarity.*

441

442 It is important to emphasize that this call to unity does not demand structural uniformity, nor

443 the complete merging of our churches into a single organizational entity. Instead, unity is

444 understood as the shared commitment to work together as Lutheran churches—each

445 retaining its own governance, traditions, and distinct identity—to proclaim the Gospel and

446 bear witness to God’s love in our communities. This approach respects the legitimate

447 diversity in church governance and leadership models across our different Lutheran bodies.

448

449 The declaration acknowledges the deep wounds and divisions born of our history and

450 recognizes the complexity involved in overcoming these challenges. It encourages healing,

451 communication, and mutual respect, fostering a unity that honours the unique expressions

452 and structures of each church. This unity within diversity is not only biblical but also practical,

453 enabling cooperation without forcing conformity.

454

455 By embracing diversity and focusing on our shared Christian faith and adherence to

456 Lutheran confessional doctrine, we are called to give a united witness to the good news of

457 Jesus Christ. This common witness strengthens our collective mission and enhances our

458 ability to serve communities across South Africa effectively.

459

460 As a Church Council, we affirm the principles laid out in the declaration and encourage

461 continued dialogue and collaboration between Lutheran churches. We recommend that

462 Synod support this vision of unity—not as structural amalgamation, but as faithful

463 cooperation and solidarity. Together, we can promote healing, nurture fellowship, and work

464 towards shared objectives that glorify God and strengthen His Church.

465

## 466 10. **Further Inter Church Relationships**

### 467 10.1 **The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA)**

468 From 7-9 June 2024, UELCSA held its General Synod in Windhoek, Namibia. The gathering

469 brought together delegates from all three synods and provided an important platform for

470 reflection, fellowship, and strategic planning.

471 During this synod the election of a new Church Council took place. The newly elected

472 members are:

- 473 • Chairperson: Bishop Gilbert Filter
- 474 • Vice-Chairperson: Bishop Theo Jäckel
- 475 • Council Member: Bishop Frank Schütte
- 476 • Synod President: Mr. Rolf-Joachim Otto
- 477 • Treasurer: Mr. Vernon Filter

478 The synod affirmed UELCSA's commitment to theological reflection, leadership development,

479 and stronger cooperation between its member synods. The meeting was marked by a spirit of

480 unity, mutual respect, and shared vision for the future of the Lutheran witness in Southern

481 Africa.

482 **10.2. The Evangelische Stadtmission in Südafrika (ESSA)**

483 The Evangelische Stadtmission in Südafrika (ESSA) is a mission-based church with a strong  
484 German-speaking heritage, based in South Africa. Rooted in the broader Evangelical  
485 tradition, ESSA is committed to urban ministry, social outreach, and fostering worship and  
486 community life—particularly, though not exclusively, among German-speaking communities  
487 in urban areas.

488 The 22nd Synod of ESSA was held in Johannesburg from 12-15 September 2024. During  
489 this Synod, Bishop Martin Frische concluded his term as bishop and entered retirement from  
490 that role, while continuing to serve in congregational ministry. A successor has not yet been  
491 elected.

492 **10.3 Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**

493 The Lutheran World Federation is a global communion of 149 member churches in the  
494 Lutheran tradition, representing over 77 million Christians in 99 countries.

495 The LWF Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the Federation and convenes every  
496 six years. The most recent Assembly—the 13th Assembly—was held in Kraków, Poland, in  
497 September 2023, where Bishop Henrik Stubbjær of Denmark was elected as the new  
498 President of the LWF.

499 NELCSA maintains a direct connection to the LWF through active youth engagement:

- 500 • PJ Hanekom serves as the youth representative for the Lutheran Communion in  
501 Southern Africa (LUCSA) on the Council of the LWF.
- 502 • Tristan Krüger and Rutendo Gora represent NELCSA as Youth Reformers in the global  
503 LWF network.

504 The LWF continues to prioritize leadership development, offering formation opportunities such  
505 as the Retreat of Newly Elected Leaders (RONEL). This program provides theological and  
506 practical training for new leaders within the communion. Bishop Jäckel participated in the  
507 RONEL retreat in 2024, as part of his leadership journey. Several lay persons have also  
508 attended the International Seminar for Lay Persons in Church Leadership.

509 **10.4 The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA)**

510 At LUCSA's 11th Assembly, Bishop Kenneth Sibanda of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
511 Zimbabwe was elected as President of LUCSA.

512 We are especially proud to share that Ms. Ann Mokhine, from our own church—NELCSA—  
513 was elected as Vice President. We celebrate this recognition of her leadership and service.

514 LUCSA continues to play an active role in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) across  
515 the region. As part of its ongoing commitment to this critical issue, LUCSA has joined the global  
516 “Thursdays in Black” campaign, which raises awareness and advocates for a world without  
517 rape and violence.

518 In addition, LUCSA provides member churches with educational resources and materials  
519 aimed at raising awareness, supporting survivors, and encouraging collective action against  
520 GBV. Through workshops, training, and solidarity campaigns, LUCSA seeks to equip churches  
521 and communities to become safe, informed, and compassionate spaces.

522 **10.5 Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)**

523 In November 2024, Bishop Kirsten Fehrs was elected as the new Chairperson of the EKD  
524 Council. She had previously served in an interim capacity after the resignation of Bishop  
525 Annette Kurschus.

526 In March 2025, the EKD appointed Oberkirchenrat (OKR) Frank Kopania as its new Bishop  
527 for Foreign Affairs (Auslandsbischof), effective 1 July 2025. He will succeed Bishop Petra  
528 Bosse-Huber, who is retiring after years of dedicated service. In his new role, Kopania will

529 oversee the EKD's international relations and ecumenical partnerships. He will also engage  
 530 with more than 100 German-speaking congregations abroad, including the two congregations  
 531 served by EKD pastors in the NELCSA (Johannesgemeinde and North Rand).

532 Some of our pastors attend courses offered by the EKD, and our lay preachers have the  
 533 opportunity to attend training courses. We thank the EKD for these opportunities, for receiving  
 534 pastors, and for the financial support to our church.

#### 535 10.6 **South African Council of Churches (SACC)**

536 In October 2024, Bishop Sithembele Anton Sipuka of the Mthatha Diocese of the Catholic  
 537 Church was elected as the new President of the SACC during its Triennial Conference.  
 538 Notably, he is the first Catholic leader to hold this position. Bishop Sipuka succeeds  
 539 Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, who served as the previous President. Ms Ann Mokhine is also  
 540 a member of the National Executive Committee.

#### 541 10.7 **Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)**

542 Dr. Niomi Venter was elected as the General Secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)  
 543 in January 2024 by the General Synod Moderamen (ASM), succeeding Dr Gustav Claasen.  
 544 In October 2024, she was appointed Second Vice-President of the SACC.

#### 545 10.8 **Church Unity Commission (CUC)**

546 Founded in 1970, the original purpose of this initiative was to foster organic unity among  
 547 participating churches, which at the time included the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational,  
 548 and Presbyterian traditions. However, a key challenge has been the differing views on the  
 549 office of oversight, particularly the role and status of the bishop. Over time, the focus has  
 550 shifted toward mutual recognition of ministry. Today, pastors from one member denomination  
 551 can serve in another, and congregants can receive ministry across church affiliations. This  
 552 has also led to the establishment of united congregations, where individuals retain their  
 553 denominational identity while being served by a pastor from one of the other member  
 554 churches.

555 Membership has grown in recent years. Originally founded in 1970 by four churches, the  
 556 CUC welcomed the NGK-SA as a member in 2019, and in 2023, NELCSA attained full  
 557 membership. This expansion brings the total number of member churches to six, along with  
 558 four observer members.

#### 559 10.9 **Evangelical – Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony (Evangelisch-Lutherisches 560 Missionswerk in Niedersachsen) (ELM)**

561 We are grateful for the long-standing good relationship with the ELM. The virtual meetings  
 562 between the ELM, the German carrier churches and the overseas partners that began  
 563 during the Covid-19 lockdown period have continued. Various topics of mutual interest are  
 564 discussed at these meetings.

565 The eMseni Centre in Kempton Park hosted a Partner Church Consultation from 28 August  
 566 to 5 September 2024, gathering 19 Lutheran churches from 15 countries to discuss global  
 567 church challenges and opportunities. The consultation provided an opportunity for these  
 568 churches to reconnect, restore, and renew their relationships. They shared their diverse  
 569 experiences of proclaiming the gospel within their unique contexts, recognizing both the  
 570 opportunities and challenges they face. The gathering acknowledged the rich diversity of  
 571 witness to Christ's message present in various cultural and societal realities. Through this  
 572 consultation, participants renewed their commitment to being a united, global body of  
 573 Christ, despite the many differences that shape their individual journeys.

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578 **11. NELCSA Structures and Models**

579 An increasing number of congregations are finding it difficult to sustain a full-time pastor.  
 580 Despite this, they continue to be active and valued members of NELCSA. Over the years,  
 581 the Church Council has recognized these diverse circumstances and has implemented  
 582 various approaches to support these congregations. However, the need for a thorough and  
 583 structured review of alternative church structures and ministry models has become evident.

584 At the 2022 Synod Session, it was decided that a systematic and comprehensive process  
 585 would be undertaken to explore NELCSA's church structure and ministry models. To lead  
 586 this initiative, the following individuals were appointed as facilitators: Ms. Tshinyi  
 587 Mavhusha, Mr. Bernd Klingenberg, Pastor Udo Lütge, Ms. Ann Mokhine, Ms. Nicky  
 588 Wenhold, Ms. Carmen Westermeyer, Mr. Rolf Lütge, and Pastor Martin Büttner.

589 We extend our heartfelt gratitude to this group for their dedication and hard work over the  
 590 past years. They have actively engaged with congregations and provided valuable input at  
 591 circuit meetings. At this 2025 Synod session, they will present a progress report for  
 592 deliberation. Their commitment to this process is greatly appreciated.

593 **12. Public Awareness Work for NELCSA**

594 NELCSA has appointed Ms. Nicky Wenhold as Social Media Coordinator. She has reached  
 595 out to all congregations regarding her role. For any inquiries, she can be contacted at  
 596 [media@nelcsa.net](mailto:media@nelcsa.net). Congregations are encouraged to share inter congregational  
 597 information with her. We thank her for her excellent work of promoting our church and its  
 598 various activities.

599 For contributions to the NELCSA website ([www.nelcsa.net](http://www.nelcsa.net)), please continue to contact  
 600 Liselotte Gunning at [webmaster@nelcsa.net](mailto:webmaster@nelcsa.net).

601

602 **Signed by Church Council and Ecclesiastical Council (EC)**

603	Theo Jäckel	Bishop
604	Henning Springer	President of Synod
605	Petra Röhrs	Deputy to the Bishop
606	Udo Lütge	Ordained Member of Church Council
607	Vernon Filter	Treasurer
608	Friedeburg Wenhold	Lay Member Northern Circuit
609	Ann Mokhine	Lay Member Central Circuit
610	Johann Engelbrecht	Lay Member Eastern Circuit
611	Dieter Küsel	Lay Member Southern Circuit
612	Wilko Hunger	Dean Central Circuit (EC)
613	Mark Meier	Dean Eastern Circuit (EC)
614	Dirk Köstlin	Dean Southern Circuit (EC)
615	Detlev Tönsing	Dean Northern Circuit (EC)