



# NELCSA

Northeastern Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in South Africa

[www.nelcsa.net](http://www.nelcsa.net)

PBO 930006651

PostNet Suite #0408, Private Bag X1, Die Wilgers 0041 • Tel: 011 979 7137 • Cell: 071 869 3332 • [bishop@nelcsa.net](mailto:bishop@nelcsa.net) • Skype: NELCSA



## **Word of greeting from Synod 2023, 19-22 October 2023 at Augsburg Congregation, Mpumalanga**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, dear Siblings,

We greet you from the first sitting of the VIII<sup>th</sup> Synod of NELCSA, themed “Hope – Live it.”

When introducing Church Council’s report, Bishop Theo Jäckel quoted Alan Paton: “South Africa is a country where you hope on Monday and despair on Tuesday.” Our discussions bore this out. Examples of hopelessness and despair abound: wars, social ills, economic hardships such as unemployment, financial and food poverty. Rural congregations highlighted the challenges and difficulties of farmers. Many congregational members are traumatized and in need of counselling, often leading to an over-burdening of pastors. We were asked to reflect on who has been *our* living hope, and for whom *we* have been, or can be, a living hope. We encourage you to reflect on these questions as well. Hope – Live it!

A great source of hope lies in the fact that we are part of a larger community of faith. This was underlined in the words of greeting from sister churches and organizations, repeatedly expressing a desire for church unity in diversity, for unity but not uniformity. As a member of the Lutheran World Foundation, NELCSA is embedded in a worldwide community of 77 million Lutherans. Where possible, we will engage in dialogue with our sister churches, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) and ELCSA (Cape Church), in a spirit of unity. We continue to work in and through the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) and the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), and we also have broader relationships with the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), the Vereinigte Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD), the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionswerk (ELM) and the Freie Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode in Südafrika (FELSISA).

This year, NELCSA was granted membership of the Church Unity Commission (CUC). The other member churches are the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches and the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk. In his word of greeting, its General Secretary, Rev. Sikawu Makubalo, added that the CUC accepts membership based on baptism, and has a mutual acceptance of ordained ministry and sacraments. The aim of the CUC is the promotion of God's glory rather than denominational success.

Two developments stood out among the congregations of NELCSA. Firstly, and regrettably, the Lutheran Congregation Dolphin Coast (LCDC) was closed, as it was no longer sustainable. Synod ratified the closure and agreed that the fund allocated for establishment of the LCDC be reallocated to Church growth and development. Secondly, West Rand Lutheran Community Church was lauded for having repaid their large debt to NELCSA. Furthermore, Church Council's decision to move Nelspruit Congregation from the Northern to the Eastern Circuit, was ratified by Synod.

We heard reports from Church Council, from Church Finances, from the working group for Ministry and Discipleship, from UELCSA theological education in Stellenbosch, and from the investigation into "Church Structures and Ministry Models".

The shortage of pastors remains a recurrent theme. There is a need to motivate suitable young people to study theology. It was encouraging to receive feedback from the Director of Studies at the Faculty of Theology in Stellenbosch, Pastor Felix Meylahn, and some of the students, who expressed their gratitude for one another's company, having a mentor and being able to study Christianity in different forms and contexts. Pastor Meylahn pointed out that a calling grows where that which you are happy and motivated to do, meets a need in society. Hope – Live it!

The working group for "Church Structures and Ministry Models" presented some initial findings, but will compile a comprehensive report on their work for the next Synod. A large majority of congregations appear to have stable or growing finances, but about half of them are declining in membership. Attendance of services, as a percentage of membership, appears to have increased. We appeal to you, once again, to submit correct statistics. A spectrum of leadership models was shown, ranging from a full-time pastor to lay volunteers. Each model has its own requirements for church law amendments, training and central support. The team will engage with congregations, councils and pastors' conventions to gather more concrete information. They emphasized the wish for continued theological consistency throughout NELCSA.

Bishop emeritus Dieter Lilje gave a presentation on "Dealing responsibly with sexuality in the broader context of the Lutheran Theology of Grace and Acceptance". He highlighted that the Lutheran theology of grace, acceptance and healing is relevant to controversial topics. We as Lutherans have a key to unlock the Bible, "that which promotes Christ", as his Grace, rather than the Law, becomes our frame of reference. It is the need of a person that dictates how Jesus responded. He had the Law at his disposal to condemn, but he accepted, loved and healed. Our task is to love and seek the wellbeing of the other and lead them to Christ through our love. Hope – Live it!

Informed by Church Council's report, Synod did not vote on the Theological Study Commission's paper on homosexuality, in order to avoid polarisation. Rather, it will continue as a discussion paper.

Pastor Felix Meylahn conducted a Bible study on Rom. 5,1-5. He related it to the theme of Synod, by stating, "The Trinity is relentlessly seeking to set us free by Grace alone!" God's Word (the Law) exposes

and diagnoses us as sinful people not admitting that we are out to control our destiny and that of others. God's Word diagnoses us and gives a prognosis (the Gospel) of a new life of acceptance through Grace. In Christ, God suffers our wanting to judge. He justifies the Father in our eyes and is killed for this. His resurrection is a confirmation of Christ's love for all people. To accept this gift for all people, does not come naturally, but it makes our conflict with the world endurable. Hope – live it!

Synod elected the following persons into office:

|                        |                  |                               |                    |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| President of Synod     | Henning Springer | Deputy to President           | Anna Kaduma-Gumbie |
|                        |                  | Deputy to deputy pres.        | Bernd Klingenberg  |
| Synod Secretary 1      | Stella Cockburn  | Deputy to Secretaries         | Heidrun Wenhold    |
| Synod Secretary 2      | Karsten Hinze    |                               |                    |
| Treasurer              | Vernon Filter    | Deputy to Treasurer           | Carmen Westermeyer |
| Ordained member        | Udo Lütge        | Deputy to ordained member     | Martin Büttner     |
|                        |                  | Deputy to Deputy              | Elke Carrihill     |
| Dean: Northern Circuit | Detlev Tönsing   | Deputy Dean: Northern Circuit | Jan Duvenhage      |
| Dean: Southern Circuit | Dirk Köstlin     | Deputy Dean: Southern Circuit | Victor Röhrs       |
|                        |                  | Deputy to Deputy              | Elke Carrihill     |
| Dean: Central Circuit  | Wilko Hunger     | Deputy Dean: Central Circuit  | Remo Köhne         |
|                        |                  | Deputy to Deputy              | Jack Magoro        |
| Dean: Eastern Circuit  | Mark Meier       | Deputy Dean: Eastern Circuit  | Reiner Focke       |
|                        |                  | Deputy to Deputy              | Randolph Kassier   |
|                        |                  | Lay member: Northern Circuit  | Lameck Malele      |

We wish all incumbents strength and wisdom in their new and continued roles.

We defined hope as a sense of expectation for something to happen, but in uncertainty. As Christians, we have hope, given to us in our baptism. Living between Christ's earthly life and his return, our calling is to give hope to all who need it. Hope – live it!



S:\C:\... 1152... 011110... 34mp  
2023-02-18 09:53:42  
/sio\_223 [shchensh3503] [num: 173] [ev: 0] [arc:0283] [color:md -color:] [local\_item: 2/0] [desam: rno: 8774] [delta: 3] [pr:dc: -27 200050] [language: 30.010000] [rel:at: 1/00 sba:sk: 15/1/16/3]