

Report on the Theological Education of UELCSA 2025

Dear members of Synod, brothers and sisters in Christ,

At the previous meeting of Synod, I reported in detail on my work in Stellenbosch as Tutor for the students of UELCSA studying for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in our member churches. For those of you who may be new members of synod I would urge you to please go back to that report, as I do not think it wise to go through the details again. (I also want to refer you to my report presented to the UELCSA Synod 2024 in Windhoek which I attach herewith. It covers most of the information and some additional points describing the work in Stellenbosch.)

This report will then only focus on the further developments that have occurred since the previous Synods. As you know, we are working in close cooperation with the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in the course called the Bachelor of Divinity – a four-year degree, which includes two years of ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek, many modules of systematic theology, practical theology, ecclesiology and of course, biblical studies of both the Old and the New Testament – as well as some courses in archaeology and ancient studies. In fact the degree is one of the courses at the University of Stellenbosch with the highest number of credits expected from students. This has led to our current project of rewriting, redesigning and adjusting the curriculum so that the credit burden is shifted and distributed more manageably, so that students can cope with it better.

In this process of redesigning/rewriting the curriculum I have been granted the opportunity to include a proposal for a third-year module in Lutheran Studies, that would become a required elective for UELCSA's students to take in that year. This process has made me acutely aware of the very detailed and sometimes overly ideologically slanted guidelines and requirements for such a course to be registered with the Education Department. I want to spend some time here to call your attention to this "problem".

More and more Education has become a commercialised enterprise in which "funders" determine what kind of candidates they want to be produced by the institution they are funding. Commonly called "outcomes-based education" it in fact has become a tightly run and controlled system of the production of "useful" (many other business-related or socio-political terms could be inserted here) citizens for the country. The original concept of a university being a space of free thinking and research unencumbered by ideological interference from rulers or even the role-players in the economy, has disappeared, much to the detriment of the academic integrity of the education that is being offered.

Because this is our situation the three churches responsible for the Bachelor of Divinity degree have developed and accompanying program and are continuing to develop it with care to come alongside the students, to create a space for them to become a Christian community while studying at the faculty – in these year-groups they are guided both liturgically and theologically to recentre themselves in their identity as baptised members of Christ, as called and sent servants who will be "serving up" the Gospel of God's Grace to the congregations into which they will be sent. It is in these "Iziko" (Xhosa for a meeting around a fire) sessions that they

receive the spiritual formation and support that they need in order to learn how the skills they acquire academically can be applied with integrity and pastoral care in the settings of their congregations. In these sessions they also form bonds of friendship and trust with each other which will be of immense value once they are working in congregations – having an ecumenical colleague in the neighbouring congregation, whom you know and care for will be very important in your ministry. This Seminar Program is in my mind the most important contribution the churches can make towards giving the students a grounding that is rooted deeply in the calling and traditions of our churches and thus a counterweight against the “outcomes based” ideology that has infiltrated all educational institutions.

In closing, I want to encourage all congregations to include our theology students, interns and young pastors in their prayers regularly – studying theology is a challenge, both academically and spiritually – they need your prayers. So, I mention them by name and indicate where they are at in the process of becoming ministers of Word and Sacrament:

Hans-Christoph Lange – (Intern in St. Martini Cape Town)

Tristan Krüger – (Intern in Germany)

PJ Hanekom (Intern in Wartburg)

Dr. Pascal Pienaar (Intern in Bloemfontein)

Rutendo Gora – (Soon to be intern in Namibia)

Wikus Oppermann (Candidate for 1st Theological Exam from Potchefstroom)

Bernhard Schiele – (B.Div IV)

Chundre Phillipus (B.Div III)

Mia Peters (B.Div II)

Sven Voges (B.Div I)

Erika Spangeberg (B.Div I)

Prospective Student for 2026

Maria Mortimer (from the Eastern Cape Circuit of the Cape Church)

P.S. Please take note that if there are members in your congregations that want to embark on the study of theology in order to become ministers of Word and Sacrament, it would be important for their pastors to guide them carefully through the process of enrolling as a candidate of UELCSA. They must be active members of your congregations and have been involved in some ministry in the congregation. The pastor, after having some in depth discussions with the person then needs to approach the bishop of the regional church, write a letter of recommendation (also signed by the church committee) and the bishop needs to have an interview with the prospective candidate and write a recommendation (if he or she agrees that this person is indeed a suitable candidate for the ministry). With these recommendations the prospective candidate can approach the chairperson of the UELCSA Church Council officially enrolling as a student. Then the prospective student can contact me and the University of Stellenbosch (the online portal for registration has been revamped) to register for the Bachelor of Divinity degree at the faculty of theology and enrol for the Seminarium programme too.

I thank you for this opportunity to share this report with you.

Felix Meylahn