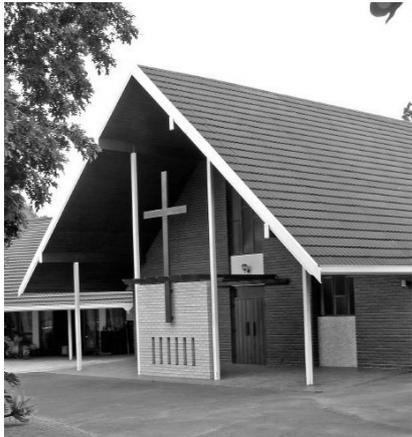


NEW GERMANY LUTHERAN CHURCH



Introduction

The New Germany Lutheran Church is the oldest congregation in the ELCSA(NT). Located in the greater Durban area, this congregation is characterized by transformation in membership and leadership structure whilst attempting to develop greater community relevance

Historical Overview

On 16 February 1969, the foundation stone of the present church building was laid. At that time, the membership stood at 321 and was growing. A document signed on that day gave thanks to the Lord of the Church for giving them the grace to proclaim His word, and for granting this oldest Evangelical Lutheran congregation in Natal to continue its service in its new home. That day marked a new chapter in the life of the congregation, which had moved from the old church in Shepstone Road, which had been its home since 1862, due to the industrialisation of Pinetown and New Germany. Jonas Bergtheil, was the man originally responsible for bringing German settlers to the area. The emigrants left Bremen on 10 November 1847 arriving in Natal on 23 March 1848. Soon after their arrival, Jonas Bergtheil asked Pastor Posselt, who had come to Natal as a missionary, to come to New Germany to marry four young couples and to baptise the babies born on the voyage. This he did, and the settlers asked him to stay on as their minister – to which he agreed on condition that he could carry on with his missionary work among the Zulu. On 12 May 1885, Wilhlem Posselt passed away after a period of illness. In his time of service Posselt also founded the Christianenburg mission congregation.

Change

Since its formation about 163 years ago, NGLC has gone through many transitions. Amongst others: from a “German only” church to a “German and English” church; from a “whites only” church to a congregation that is open to all races; from a traditional style of worship to a contemporary style of worship. Transitions usually happen over a period of time and are accompanied by feelings of anxiety and excitement. A congregation that resists transitions altogether, loses its relevance within a changing society and dies, sooner or later. The pastor and the congregational council have always, and probably will always, play a central role in leading the congregation. What changes from time to time, though, is the style of leadership. Historically, the pastor was understood to be the caretaker of all spiritual matters, while the congregational council was seen to be responsible for all administrative and practical matters. There was a clear distinction between the spiritual and the worldly. The pastor’s word and interpretation often reigned supreme, almost elevating him (women were not yet ordained) to the position of a “demigod”. Notwithstanding this, the congregational council also had an elevated standing within the congregation and it was regarded as a special honour to be nominated and elected. In this time everybody knew everyone and the pastor had personal contact with all in the congregation. Over time, a shift started happening within the congregation – laity was taught and encouraged to be more outspoken on spiritual matters. The concept of cell groups, initially led by the pastor and later by laypeople, was introduced. Supported by transitions within society, the autocratic and pastor centred leadership style became less and less effective. In response to these changes the congregational council of NGLC felt a need to respond. In a series of workshops, the council agreed to introduce an

adapted Programme Church structure which grows out of the necessity for a high-quality personal relationship with the pastor to be supplemented by other avenues of spiritual feeding. Programmes must now begin to fulfil that supplementary role. The well functioning Programme Church has many cells of activity, which are headed up by lay leaders. With the appropriate guidance, these lay leaders take on some pastoral functions. The Pastor still has a shepherding role in the church. In fulfilling this task the Pastor is accountable to the congregation, the Congregational Council and the Church Council of ELCSA(N-T). Historically speaking, NGLC was a “German only” congregation that was started because of the spiritual needs of German immigrants. Over time these Germans became South Africans and as inter-marriages with other cultures started, the need for English services arose. Statistics of the past few decades show that the introduction of these services was wise and necessary. There has since been a steady decline in German service attendance and an increasing attendance in English services. Generally, the German services have remained a need for the older generation only. This is a pity, because besides the Catholic Church in Mariannhill, the Lutherans are the only church who still offer German services in the greater Durban area. Yet, there are still a number of Germans in this area who do not attend or belong to any church. There is a missionary opportunity through the German medium that will be lost if the declining trend continues. The challenge is to find younger German-speaking persons who have a passion for this work. A further shift that started in NGLC about 2 decades ago was when non-whites started attending services and becoming members. This has been a wonderful transition that has contributed to the uniqueness of NGLC within the Lutheran Church in the greater Durban area. It has given us as individuals the opportunity of a non-threatening integration, which is a reality of today’s society in South Africa.

Challenges

As a congregation that wants to be relevant through being a community focused church there are a number of challenges that face NGLC. Community relevance has to do with more than just offering services in English. It might also include using the facilities of the church centre for community orientated courses. The church centre is also a place where the congregation can follow an example of how an environmentally friendly house/community/garden can be set up. It is in these steps of being an example that the NGLC can develop community relevance. The challenge however remains for us to find ways of encouraging more non-white members to be involved in the congregation and to help them feel at home. It is good that so many attend our services, but the expectation of leaving the responsibilities of running a congregation to a few is not healthy. The Congregational Council believes that the extension of council and a restructuring of the leadership will go a long way in helping us find answers to this challenge.

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Services

English Service every Sunday at 08h30.

German Services every first and third Sunday of the month at 10h00.