

Report of the Leader of the Church Choir Association of the ELCSA(N-T) 25.4.2015

At the end of my time as leader of the Choir Association I would like to thank my loyal committee members and helpers for their support and hard work. A very special thank you goes to Maria Hillermann, who typed the entire choir festival booklet every time and then also formatted the programmes for the respective festival services. We now appreciate her hard work all the more in view of the fact that she has not been a member of the committee for a number of years! I would also like to thank Udo Lütge, our perceptive and responsive spiritual counsellor, for his input with regard to the programme and for his continuous moral support. Thank you to the circuit leaders for their efforts to organise joint rehearsals in their circuits and to encourage choir members to participate in the festival. And a special thank you goes to our very able accompanist, Connie Ortmann. And last but not least, I would like to thank all the singers and choir leaders for their hard work. I admire the courage and perseverance with which they keep tackling the many and varied works contained in the choir books. I realise that some of them are little suited to small choirs, while others have failed to find immediate popular appeal. In particular, I would like to commend the singers of the Friedenskirche for the enthusiasm with which they keep rehearsing the German choir arrangements.

Our choir festival was celebrated on 26.4.2015 in Germiston. Our motto was Ecclesiastes 3:1: *Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses.* The festival was a resounding success and it was attended by ±345 people, of whom 115 sang in the choir. Bishop Horst Müller addressed us during the service and we thank him for his moving words. Gerald Kohlmeyer and Walter Johannes helped with the conducting, and with Connie Ortmann's capable organ and piano accompaniment the choir pieces went very well and everybody enjoyed the singing. It is always a great privilege to be able to praise God in the company of so many singers. We thank the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church East Rand for all their hard work, the plentiful and excellent food and the flawless organisation. Such festivals always require a great deal of preparation, and the more people attend, the more difficult the planning becomes. We also thank the members of the Johannesgemeinde for offering to help with the accommodation. In future, congregations may regularly have to club together for such occasions, especially if they have fairly small numbers of members and limited financial resources.

Last year (2014) the customary regional choir festivals again took place in two of the three circuits. Unfortunately personal reasons prevented me from attending the choir festival of the Northern Circuit in Kroondal on 3.8.2014. It was attended by 80 singers. However, I was able to take part in the choir festival of the Southern Circuit in Harburg on 14.9.2014. This was attended by 54 singers and about 200 congregants. Unfortunately no choir festival took place in the Eastern Circuit. The individual congregations already had so much planned that no date could be found which suited everybody. In the Southern Circuit we have solved this problem by determining a particular Sunday on which we routinely have either our circuit choir festival or our circuit brass band festival. Even so, individual congregations persist in making their own plans. We can no longer adhere to the old rule that individual congregations should not have their own services when a circuit festival takes place. There are many different interests and not everybody can or even wants to take part in everything. In the Southern Circuit we had an additional worship team weekend which, it is hoped, will also become a regular occurrence. Thus there is a glut of activities, which is a good sign that our congregations are alive and well. But in future we shall have to think carefully about how we can accommodate it all under one umbrella.

During my second term of office our committee consisted of myself, our spiritual counsellor, Udo Lütge, the leader of the Eastern Circuit, Gerald Kohlmeyer, who was also my vice leader, the vice

leader of the Eastern Circuit, Christel Küsel, the leader of the Northern Circuit, Walter Johannes, the vice leader of the Northern Circuit, Thea Thiele, the leader of the Southern Circuit, Wolfgang Kassier, the vice leader of the Southern Circuit, Ingrid Lütge, and our secretary, Walli Düvel. We would like to thank our bishop, Horst Müller, that he attended our committee meetings as often as he could and regularly gave us his valuable input per e-mail. The committee met in Paulpietersburg on 19.8.2013, in Wartburg on 23.1.2015 and again in Germiston on 24.4.2015. At the meeting of representatives on 25.4.2015 in Germiston I retired as leader of the Choir Association. Walter Johannes was elected as new leader, while Eduard Meyer was appointed as leader of the Northern Circuit. Otherwise the committee has remained unchanged. We thank the two newly elected leaders for their willingness to do this important work and wish them God's blessing.

At the last meeting of representatives in Piet Retief we had decided to acquire a new choir book, *Frau Musica spricht*. We would like to thank Bishop Horst Müller for his efforts in this regard. He negotiated with the Evangelical Church in Germany, and they granted us a generous sponsorship, without which the books would have cost us twice the amount we now paid. Horst also handled the order and other details, including those pertaining to customs duties. Not all the choirs bought books for all their singers, thus there are still some books for sale. We have already used the book for the Choir Festival, and I hope that even those singers who disliked some of the arrangements at first, have found enjoyment in their singing. The 2015 Choir Festival booklet was ready by February 2014 and was distributed among the various congregations by private persons. The biggest problem regarding the choice of songs for the festival remains the great diversity in the needs and tastes of the various choirs.

Udo Lütge has reviewed and rewritten the constitution of our Choir Association and has brought it in line with the constitution of the Brass Band Association. We have sent a draft of the new constitution to everyone for critical consideration. However, we shall postpone the final decision regarding its acceptance or rejection until the next meeting of representatives in two years time.

Bishop Horst Müller indicated at the meeting of representatives in Piet Retief that the church authorities would like to appoint a representative who can advise them on all branches of church music. We now have such a representative in the person of Connie Ortmann. We thank her for accepting this position. I sincerely hope that we can gradually bridge the deep divide between so-called traditional music and worship music. We shall have to see what the future holds for us. Four-part choir singing seems to be losing support in the congregations of the bigger cities. Members of current choirs are aging and younger recruits are rare. Udo Lütge is trying very hard to instil an enthusiasm for four-part choir singing in our young people by offering them regular opportunities for such singing at the "Rüstwochen". These efforts do seem to be bearing fruit. But when all is said and done, the various congregations will have to abide by their own tastes and needs. Nevertheless, I hope that we shall still always be able to praise God together with our stylistically diverse songs.

Marianne Kassier.