

“Works of kindness”

**PRESIDENT’S REPORT
to the
57th REGULAR SYNODICAL CONVENTION
of the
FREE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD IN SOUTH AFRICA (FELSISA)**

Esteemed Synodical Convention, honoured delegates and guests, dear brothers and sisters,

1. Introduction

I am writing this report in an *acting* position as our previous president, the Rev. Peter Ahlers, reached the official retirement age and handed back the presidency of the FELSISA on 31 December 2009. Wittenberg congregation has requested his services for another year which was approved by the Synodical Council. Although he therefore continues to be an active pastor in the FELSISA he will surely be missed, not least of all for his spiritual leadership and extremely efficient administrative skills. We however thank God for the time president Ahlers could serve our Synod and we wish him and his wife God’s continued blessing on their personal and ministerial lives.

2. Spiritual reflection on the topic

In the past years changes have taken place in the FELSISA, epitomised by the fact that this report is being read in English for the first time. It may not be equally welcomed by all. And since this decision was taken at the last Synodical Convention there has been reaction to it from various quarters. Amongst the members of the Synodical Council there has been understanding for this reaction. Language and culture forms an integral part of any person’s identity and creates a feeling of belonging. Any change is experienced as a disturbance of the known and familiar. Within the setting of the church, however, change provides us with the challenge to explore our *primary* identity: Who are we? To whom do we belong? Who is the Lord of the church? What does it mean to be a confessional Lutheran Church in South Africa?

Conflict forms a “natural” part of this process. Needless to say, conflict is not something that is sought or enjoyed. It disturbs the harmony and challenges the comfort zones. The natural tendency is therefore to withdraw or to resist the change with all the energy at your disposal. But conflict also has the positive aspect that it helps us to re-evaluate and re-discover goals and mission. In fact sociologists deem conflict to be the “creative force” of change that helps us to adapt and remain effective in an ever changing world. Without conflict there would be no change. In the light of this, the Synodical Council - difficult as it may be to deal with conflict - wishes to be open and receptive for what “the Lord of the Church” may want to work in our Synod. It may be a time of imminent blessing and the crossing of new frontiers with more people than ever being reached by the Gospel of Christ. Although caution may be called for at times, more often than not boldness is needed. The theologian Oswald Sanders notes: “A great deal more failure is the result of an excess of caution than of bold experimentation of new ideas”. Conversely one of the greatest dangers is just to “pitch tent” (and fence off) without

continually striking new “camp” and pro-actively looking for opportunities to spread the Gospel of Christ *to all*. The Synodical council senses that doors are being opened.

As noted, times of change and conflict call more than ever for reflection. It would be a victory for Satan if discussions within Synod would focus exclusively on how to avoid and resolve conflicts. In times of change and uncertainty it is more prudent to rediscover the mission of the church and in particular the “heart of God” that never changes. It is in the light of this, that “works of kindness” was chosen as the general topic for this years Synodical Convention. It is, if you like, a matter of exploring and rediscovering one of the many “core values” that characterise the follower of Christ.

Near the end of 2009, I was personally touched by Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25:31-47, generally known as the “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats”, or the “Parable of the Great Judgement”. It is a disturbing parable that sketches the events unfolding when the Son of Man returns. Judgement takes place and the sheep are separated from the goats. The sheep are praised and are invited to take their seat in the kingdom of heaven. The reason given is that they performed “works of kindness”. The king says:

³⁵ I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

The goats are rejected due to the lack of such works of kindness.

This parable is challenging on various accounts. Jesus seems to indicate in this parable that “works” do play a role in determining our final destiny. But interestingly these actions can not simply be equated to the “Law” (Torah) of God, that is, a number of deeds captured in a list, which when kept to the letter provides you access to kingdom of God. The 1st century Pharisees and scribes made every effort to adhere to such lists. The actions spoken of in this parable are, however, not mandated by the law. They are typically actions performed to alleviate problems of the *unfortunate* - hunger, thirst, being a stranger, lacking clothes, illness, and imprisonment. None of these actions are explicitly named in the “law” nor do they adhere to the typical virtues of the ancient world, such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. They correspond rather to what can be called “deeds of loving kindness”. Although not explicitly listed in the “Law” they are certainly known in the Old Testament, where the Israelites are encouraged to share their bread with the hungry, provide shelter for the poor, cloth the naked (see *inter alia* Is.58:7-10; Dt 15:7-11; Job 22:7; Prov 25:21) and to take special care of the orphans and widows (Ex. 22:22; Dt 14:29; 16:11; 24:17, 26:12; 27:19). The actions mentioned in the parable address the most basic human needs: Food, drink, shelter and clothing. Even the visit of those in prison apply, as they were dependant on relatives or friends to supply them with food and water (generally not provided by the Roman prison authorities).

Notably these deeds characterised the very life of Jesus. His lack of adhering to certain “laws” caused an outcry, but what characterised every aspect of his life were “works of kindness” - and indeed to those who could not reciprocate. On coming to earth, he made his home amongst the “unfortunate” and “desperate”, who had nothing to eat or drink, the lonely and the sick. Why? Because that is where God wanted to be. And he wants

to be there because his “heart” is one of “mercy and kindness”.

Throughout Scripture “mercy” is shown to be God’s central attribute. In the psalms for example, God is praised as a father who has compassion on his children (see 103:13). And in both the *Magnificat* (Mary’s song) and the *Benedictus* (Zechariah’s song) “mercy” is central in describing God’s act in sending his Son. It is a love that even extends to enemies and those who hate (Lk 6:27, 35). It is not surprising therefore that God’s holiness (“I, the Lord your God, am holy ... therefore be holy, because I am holy” - Lev. 11:14), usually interpreted in terms of obedience and adhering to the law, is re-interpreted in the New Testament in terms of mercy (“Be merciful just as your Father is merciful” - Lk.6:36). Being holy, means to be merciful, which in turn becomes the key to understand the Law of God.

The sheep in Jesus parable are clearly not invited to enter the kingdom of the Father because they *perfected* acts of mercy or kindness. The kingdom is “inherited” by them. But the acts of mercy “identify” them with the “Son of Man”. They show to whom they belong. Put differently: The acts of mercy are not just something they do, they are an expression of who they *are* and they show to whom they *belong*. They are the *evidence* of a person’s blessed state, or are a *symptom* of the underlying relationship that people have with Christ.

The theologian, Richard Hoefler, says in his book, *The Divine Trap*, that this parable is not a “prescription” (this is what you must do to get to heaven), but it is a “description” (it describes those who belong to the Son of Man). Works of mercy are not motivated by the law. They are rather the result, the fruit of being *in Christ*, the Son of Man, and the realisation of having received unconditional mercy.

Earlier on we asked the question of our *primary* identity. Our primary identity is obviously not the language we speak or the culture to which we belong, despite its social importance. Nor is our primary identity the upkeep of our church buildings or the importance we attach to our church customs (important as both may be). In fact, nothing we pride ourselves on can be our primary identity. As Christians and children of the Reformation our identity is Christ and that through an act of mercy and grace we belong to HIM. And this belonging comes to the fore by “works of kindness” that he works through us.

Earlier this year I attended a braai. During the braai some people became aware that I was the pastor of the Lutheran Church in Edgemoed. And somebody responded to his friend: “Doesn’t your son live near that church? Why doesn’t he go there?” And the person said: “My son says, that *that* Lutheran Church is the one with the many rules and regulations”. I don’t think he had ever attended our church, at least not since I have been in Cape Town, but that was his “perception”, which raises the question in general: How do people see the FELSISA, or one of its congregations? What do they say, when they hear the name of the congregation to which you belong? Rules and regulations (also in maintaining a clear confession) are necessary in this world, but they should not constitute our “identity”. Nobody ever associated Christ with rules and regulations. They were touched or disturbed by his works of kindness. For this reason, I would be grateful if perceptions of our congregation in Cape and the FELSISA in general could change: That is the church of mercy! That is where people experience God’s grace! Isn’t that exactly what the Reformation principles - Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and

Scripture alone - express?!

Who are these works of kindness directed to? Who are the recipients? They are identified as “the least of these brothers of mine” (v.40, 45). This line has often been understood to refer to the “unfortunates” and “needy” in this *world in general*. Such an interpretation is supported by various other passages in Scripture that explicitly refer to “works of kindness” directed at the poor irrespective of their ethnicity or religious background. In the Old Testament “foreigners” are singled out for special support (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33, 34; Deut. 1:16; 10:19; 24:14, 17; 27:19?; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Ezek. 22:29; Mal. 3:5). In the New Testament Jesus encourages “love for the enemy” and those “who persecute you” (Mt. 5:44). Loving only those who love you and those who can reciprocate is also practised by the heathens. Ethnic and religious boundaries are clearly crossed in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37).

However in the context of Matthew's Gospel the works of kindness are directed at Jesus in the person of “his insignificant followers”. In Matthew's Gospel the word “least”, a superlative of the adjective “little”, in every instance refers either to biological siblings or to spiritual kin (a Jew speaking about a fellow Jew, or Jesus or one of his disciples speaking about another follower of Christ”) (see Mt. 10 and 18). The focus in Matthew's Gospel is clearly on the desperate and needy within the faith community. Again, this does not exclude helping others, but indicates where neglect is even less understood. The apostle Paul in Galatians 6:10 encourages us to do good to “all” people, but “especially” to those of the household of faith (see also Acts 2:44-45). It was this phenomenon, among other, that made the world in the 1st century take note of the Christians: It saw how the church truly cared for her own in line with what Jesus said in John 13:35: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”. In the FELSISA we should realise that this “love” is not restricted to a particular church body or a denomination. I have personally been touched by churches in Cape Town that have set it as a goal to help other struggling churches in the community. The fulfilment of Christ-like love to the “least of the brothers” (both within the church and beyond) have proved to have a greater evangelistic impact and brought more glory to God than any discussion about programmes of outreach and strategies for church growth.

History shows that most missionary movements began at the fringes of the church, among the poor and the marginalised, and seldom at the centre. Church polity, that is, well-run institutions led by competent leaders, has seldom if ever led to church growth. On the contrary, moving out of the centre to the fringes of church and society, that is where the real mission begins. A church that engages at the fringes almost always brings life to the centre. I sincerely believe, this was Jesus' message to his disciples against the backdrop of the 1st century temple institution so effectively run by the priests, scribes, and Pharisees, but “without a heart of love” and “acts of kindness”. In whatever we do, we need to write in capital and bold letters: “God is mercy”. This mercy defines his holiness. It is a “fruit” of faith. And according to this parable “righteousness before God” is characterised in part by mercy.

In the parable helping the unfortunates is described as helping Christ himself (who always identified with the poor): “You did it for me” (v.40b). These words touched Mother Teresa in her many years of ministry in the slums of Calcutta. In an interview (1974) she said: “I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper's wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?” Serving Christ is

often put forward as the motivation for “works of kindness”. However neither the righteous or the unrighteous in the parable knew that they were responding to Jesus. They never saw “his face”. What motivates us therefore is nothing else than the “mercy of God received”. This “mercy” is epitomised in Christ, the lamb of God, whom was sacrificed for us and *demonstrated* his love for us “while we were still sinners” (Rom.5:8).

We shouldn't forget that we are dealing with a "parable". This parable is hardly a realistic description of the final judgement to be understood literally in every aspect. The author of any parable has an intent in telling the story. The intent in Matthew 25, among other, is to encourage “works of kindness”. It is an appeal to the faith community to have a "heart of mercy" as God himself has. The parable clearly "affects" the members of its audience rhetorically to move them to care and mercy. May our Synod be moved equally, both in our decision- making here, as well as in our every day lives within our congregations and the communities in which we live. May “mercy” and the ensuing “works of kindness” characterise the FELSISA.

3. Overview of events since the previous Convention

3.1 Resolutions of the last Synodical Convention

3.1.1 Women Church Councillors

At the previous Synodical Convention the motion was accepted to allow women to be elected as church councillors. Initially the motion had caused immense dissatisfaction as St Paul's Congregation, Fairlands, had in contravention of the Constitution of the FELSISA elected and installed two women as councillors as early as February 2007. The synodical council reiterates its position as stated in par. 1.7.1.12 of the Constitution that both pastors and congregations (whether they agree or not) are bound to accept and implement the resolutions taken by the Synodical Convention. The adoption of the motion did, however, lead to positive results in Fairlands. In the past two years the congregation has experienced good growth with more members of the congregation accepting roles of responsibility, with both women church councillors playing a pivotal role in motivating the congregation, always leading by example.

3.1.2 Language use

The 2008 Synodical Convention also resolved that from 2010 the Synodical Convention is to be conducted in English which is the common language understood by most in our country. The resolution does, however, allow delegates to use the language of their preference, which - if not English or Afrikaans - is to be translated into English. The resolution is confined to the Synodical Convention, the decision making body of our Synod. With regard to the other synodical events, like the Brass Band Festival and the Song Festival the practise is still in place that the hosting congregation may determine the language use. Unfortunately the language use at the synodical Youth Day has not been clearly defined as the event is organised by the Youth Association of the FELSISA, but hosted in a local congregation. This has become a discussion point at the meeting of the youth leadership. It should be noted, however, that not all matters can or should be resolved within the Church of Christ by simply determining who has the right to make decisions. Our focus should rather be on discerning the will of Christ, who is the Lord of the Church, and determining how we as a synod can fulfil the Church's mission as

defined by Christ (Mt 28:19-20). Debates on questions of language should be done with the necessary sensitivity to all involved in a manner that is uplifting and reflects the attitude of Christ. For the Synodical Council the challenges posted by different languages - difficult as they be - are welcomed as a blessing. They are a sign of the FELSISA expanding into a multi-lingual and multi-cultural church with more opportunities than ever to share the Gospel and our Lutheran confessions.

With regard to the correspondence directed to all congregations the 2008 Synodical Convention resolved that “as a rule” such correspondence should also be conducted in English. But realising what a sensitive issue language is, effort has been made to correspond in various languages. We ask for forbearance if this practise cannot always be adhered to. The president of Synod works without a secretary and translation efforts are extremely time-consuming.

3.1.3 The Lutheran Theological Seminar in Tshwane (LTS)

The 2008 Synodical Convention resolved that the Synodical Council should negotiate and sign a shareholder agreement and appoint a director to the Board of Directors (BOD). Thereafter a Special Synodical Convention was to be called to discuss the FELSISA’s involvement at the Seminary. Unfortunately the appointment of the director (Dr. Dieter Reinstorf was nominated by the Synodical Council) and the completion and signing of the Shareholder Agreement took longer than expected. Various burning issues at the Seminary dominated the agenda (to be covered in the report by the newly elected chairman of the BOD, Dr. G. Rencken.) On 8 December 2009 the Shareholder Agreement was eventually signed by the leaders of the *Lutheran Church in Southern Africa* (LCSA - Bishop Dr. David Tswaedi), the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC - Mission director Markus Nietzke), and the *Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa* (FELSISA - president Peter Ahlers). It was a festive occasion. According to this agreement the LCSA holds 40% of the shares and the MLC and FELSISA 30% respectively. Realising that the signing of the agreement was being delayed the Synodical Council had informed the congregations of the FELSISA in good time that no Special Synodical Convention would be called. Instead the Synodical Council has prepared a motion with concrete proposals for discussion at this Synodical Convention. In the past two years it also became clear that it would take some time before the LTS, possibly in collaboration with the University of Pretoria, could present a course in theology that would meet the expectations of Synod. For this to happen the LTS simply needs more full and part-time lecturers.

The FELSISA’s pastors were grateful for the invitation extended by the LTS to attend the theological conference sponsored by the *Concordia Lutheran Seminary* in Fort Wayne (USA) and held at the FELS Retreat near Lüneburg, in August 2009.

3.1.4 Other Resolutions

Assistance was to be given in ordering devotional books from Germany (10.2.7. & 12.3). Unfortunately this task was not fulfilled as the person responsible - in his words - was frustrated by the lack of support given in compiling a list of devotional books. All other resolutions by the 2008 Convention were executed as decided upon. Various issues will be addressed in reports given at this Synodical Convention.

4. Events in the FELSISA since the previous Synodical Convention

4.1 Work of the Synodical Council

As in the past the Synodical Council met regularly. Since the last Synodical Convention in 2008 it met eight times. The meetings were held primarily in Pretoria in order to combine trips to other meetings that had to be attended by synodical council members. The intent remains to hold the meetings in various congregations and to meet with the respective church councils.

4.2 Pastor's Convention

The Pastor's Convention, held in Greytown in June 2009, dealt with various issues of importance. On request I had prepared a discussion document on the FELSISA's position towards "Homosexuality" consisting of 12 theses. In short these theses distinguish between homosexual tendencies (comparable to alcoholic tendencies) and *practising* homosexuality. However, there is clearly a need to expand the theses' with pastoral guidelines, which is to be addressed at the next Pastor's Convention.

Work also continued on the "Explanations and Guidelines for Ecumenical Meetings". This document is reaching its final stage and should be concluded soon.

There is clearly a need to revise the "Life Norms and Values" (paragraph 5 of the Constitution and Bylaws of the FELSISA). Various paragraphs no longer apply, or need to be reworded for changing contexts. Our sister church in Germany, the *Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* (SELK - the *Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church*), has recently engaged in a similar exercise and published its work in a booklet entitled: *Mit Christus leben: Eine evangelisch-lutherische Wegweisung* (Living with Christ: An Evangelical Lutheran Orientation). This work is to serve as a basis and help for revising our own "Life norms and values" to be presented at (the next) Pastor's convention.

Needless to say the FELSISA does not have the research capacity to address all issues on hand, but needs to rely on the work done in its sister churches. Furthermore, there is a growing realisation that meetings should not be confined to addressing matters of governance and daily living. More time needs to be made in fulfilling the mission of the church and reaching more people with the Gospel.

4.3 Church Councillors Meeting

The Church Councillors Meeting held in Greytown in November 2008 explored the topic "Called into the service of God". It focussed on both the identity and duties of a church councillor. Pastor Georg Mabe of the *Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Congregation* (EELC) was the guest speaker. He read an insightful paper on what it means to be a church council member in Diepkloof, Soweto. In 2009 the church councillors meeting was held at the FELS-Retreat outside Paulpietersburg. It was held in German and addressed the topic of "Church and Language".

With regard to the Church Councillors Meeting, the Synodical Council has followed the approach of clearly announcing in what language meetings (or part of meetings) are held, often determined by guest speakers. Again the Synodical Council can only appeal

to church councillors to support these meetings irrespective of their personal preferences as an expression of Christian fellowship and unity across language lines.

4.4 English-Afrikaans District

On 26 September 2009 the English-Afrikaans District of the FELSISA met in Wittenberg for its 4th official meeting. At the meeting the majority of delegates resolved to disband the district, which was confirmed by the Synodical Council of the FELSISA. Reasons for disbandment were twofold: (1) The district was constituted not to start a separate group within the FELSISA, but to provide minority groups in the FELSISA with a “forum” where their interest and needs could be heard and debated. However, since Synod resolved in 2008 that the Synodical Convention is to be conducted in “English” from 2010, all language groups within the FELSISA, will be able to present their own proposals to Synod. (2) There is a growing awareness that a small church has only a limited number of human resources to fill certain positions. Dividing Synod into various districts with most works being duplicated, over extends the means at Synod’s disposal. In future tasks pertaining to a particular language group will need to be overseen by the Synodical Council by means of appointing either individuals or working committees for the tasks on hand.

A work that still needs to be completed is the compiling of the 2nd English Songbook. A work well-done is the translation of *Luther’s Small Catechism* in Afrikaans, sponsored by the *Lutheran Heritage Foundation*. The work was done by members of St. Paul’s congregation in Pretoria who formed a “translation team”. Our sincere thanks is herewith expressed to them for the hard and dedicated work. The Catechism is available for R50.00.

4.5 Retirement Fund

With the retirement of President Peter Ahlers, Pastor Helmut Straeuli was elected by the pastor’s convention to serve on the management committee of the FELSISA Retirement Fund. Pastor Michael Ahlers was elected as alternate member. The chairman is Mr. Wolfgang Beier who will be reporting at Synod. Other members are: Mr Herbert Schulz and Walter Scharlach (as alternate member) and myself. We thank president Ahlers for the many years of dedicated and informed service.

4.6 Synodical Finances

In reflecting on the finances of Synod the Synodical Council would like to express its sincere thanks to all congregations for the contributions and regular payments made. It is heart-warming to see how generously people give for the building of God’s kingdom. But mention also needs to be made of the services of the treasurer, Mr. Berno Niebuhr and president (em) Peter Ahlers. Until the last three months I never realised how much work Mr. Niebuhr and his secretary Mrs. Rina van Leyveld do for our Synod without ever seeking remuneration or a word of praise or thanks. But the same applies to president (em) Peter Ahlers. Together they made a great team that will not be matched in future. Realising this and knowing my own limitations I have already tasked the always-willing-to-help Pastor Harry Niebuhr to do the Top-up calculations for pensioners. Consideration will also need to be given by the new Synodical Council to task others (individuals or a finance committee), not only to set up a budget, but also to work pro-

actively within Synod (and elsewhere) to source funds for what we believe are necessary projects for the future well being of Synod.

4.7 Medical Aid

Since January 2010 the pastors of the FELSISA are on a different Medical Aid Scheme, Discovery Health. This decision was taken on advice of a medical broker (provided by Mr. Wolfgang Beier). The new medical aid is more stable, has greater resources, and the option chosen costs less than that of the previous Medical Aid Scheme. Based on the costs saved, agreement was reached on an additional “cap cover” (presently at R95 a month) to cover excessive hospital and specialist fees not covered by the Medical Aid Scheme.

4.8 FELSISA Newsletter and Website

For the past two years I served as editor of the FELSISA Newsletter, *Bekennende Lutherische Kirche* (BLK), with the support of Ute Johannes (Pretoria). When in September 2009 the English-Afrikaans district was disbanded, the decision was taken to translate the official newsletter of the FELSISA, the *Bekennende Lutherische Kirche* (BLK), also into English and Afrikaans. As my time is limited due to an increasing work load, Ute Johannes has agreed to prepare the layout of both newsletters from 2010. There is a definite need to get more people involved and for others to take responsibility for the newsletter.

Pastors Josef Henning and Dieter Schnackenberg were responsible for the Website. A change in personnel is also imminent to ensure the continued upkeep of the Website (see below). President (em) Ahlers (German) and Pastor Straeuli (English) are thanked for the regular sermon contributions.

5. Events in the Congregations

5.1 Wittenberg

As already noted, Wittenberg congregation has requested the continued service of president (em) Peter Ahlers for at least one more year. This means that the deployment of president Ahlers to Wittenberg at the beginning of 2007, initially envisaged to be for a period of only one and a half years, will have been extended to a total of four (4) years by the end of 2010. This is a testimony to the good relationship that exists between president (em) Ahlers and the Wittenberg congregation. Notably president Ahlers was never officially called by the congregation, but deployed to Wittenberg by the Synodical Council with the understanding that the congregation would be regarded as “vacant”. It is a position that is presently being reviewed. For the sake of clarity, a congregation can strictly speaking only be regarded as vacant if there is no full-time pastor in its service, irrespective of whether that pastor was called, deployed, or continues to serve that congregation after retirement.

5.2 Kempton Park

Since president (em) Ahlers was deployment to Wittenberg at the beginning of 2007, the congregation in Kempton Park has been vacant. Since then Pastor Klaus-Eckart

Damaske (Pretoria - Afrikaans) has served as vacancy pastor. But despite all effort by members and pastor the years of vacancy have taken their toll. During this time various meetings were held with members of the Synodical Council. Consideration was given to the viability of calling a pastor from overseas, possibly a missionary or a church planter from one of our sister churches. But every employment (especially from the USA or Germany) involves huge expenses and the potential of growth needs to be assessed carefully. More recently the Synodical Council has encouraged the members of Kempton Park to consider dissolving the congregation and attending services in either Pretoria or Randburg/Fairlands. However at its most recent Annual General Meeting the decision was taken to continue with the present status quo as long as Pastor Damaske (with the consent of Pretoria - Afrikaans) is willing to continue with his services, in the hope that things may change to the better in future. In July 2008 Kempton Park had 13 official members.

5.3 Pietermaritzburg

The Immanuel Congregation in Pietermaritzburg has been vacant since April 2007. During its vacancy it has been served by the neighbouring FELSISA pastors Helmut Straeuli, Chris Johannes, and Siegfried Köhne (often also with the support of Pastor em Werner Köhne). Also for Pietermaritzburg this has been a trying und frustrating time. In November 2009 it called me (presently in Cape Town) to be its pastor. On the basis of various decisions that need to be made at this Synodical Convention I requested the congregation to either call another pastor or to put the call "on hold" until after this convention. It agreed to do the latter.

Based on the timing of the call I received, November 2009 (initiated by the Synodical Council), the Synodical Council has in hindsight given some thought to opening a "window period" for the calling of pastors with children in schools and wives that are employed. Such a window period would be earlier in the year so that on accepting a call the necessary relocation arrangements can be made. The congregations need to realise that school applications and new job applications for a spouse are complex issues these days. If at all possible they need to be planed well in advance and possibly with the help of the calling congregation.

5.4 Our Saviour

Kirchdorf congregation has shown great initiative in providing a pastor for *Our Saviour congregation* (a congregational affiliate of Kirchdorf), which became vacant at the same time as *Immanuel* congregation in Pietermaritzburg. An *Agreement* has been reached between the *Lutherische Kirchenmision* (LKM) and Kirchdorf congregation for the employment of missionary Christian Tiedemann to serve both *Our Saviour* and *Pella* congregations. The agreement is valid for 5 years until 2014. The remuneration of the pastor is paid by the LKM and Kirchdorf congregation. For this reason the 2008 Synodical Convention agreed that the contributions paid by Kirchdorf to Synod on behalf of *Our Saviour* congregation cease as long as this agreement with the LKM is in place.

5.5 English Lutheran Fellowship (ELF)

At the end of February 2010 Pastor Josef Henning announced his resignation from the FELSISA. As agreed with him beforehand, it will come into effect at the end of April

2010, although indications are that this time might be extended for a few months. Pastor Henning received and accepted a call to serve a Lutheran Congregation in the USA. At the time of writing this report no arrangements have been made for the vacancy period.

6. Personnel Situation

6.1 Vacancies, Pastors and Vicars

The FELSISA has 13 active pastors (including president em. Peter Ahlers). Presently the pastoral positions in Kempton Park and Pietermaritzburg are vacant, with ELF soon to follow. Strictly speaking two more pastoral positions will be vacant at the end of 2010, Wittenberg and Kirchdorf. Kirchdorf congregation has shown the willingness to re-employ Pastor Köhne for one more year, to which he has agreed (depending on his health). If I should receive a call to the Seminary and accept, there will be a vacancy in Cape Town from the end of 2010 as well. Needless to say the next few years will be a tremendous juggling act that will test our patience and above all our trust in God.

Thankfully two students of theology, Tobias Albers and Helmut Paul, have completed their main courses in theology and are presently engaged in their vicarage in Durban-Westville and Pretoria congregations respectively. If they pass their 2nd theological exam, they should be ready to receive a call in May and June 2011. It is expected that another student, Martin Paul (Krummels), will start his vicarage in 2011 and be ready for a call in 2012. Fact is, with our present personnel and students we can expect one or two vacancies for the next four to five years. Consideration may need to be given to establish parishes (one pastor for two or more congregations) or to source the services of pastors from one of our sister or partner churches. Thankfully no retirements are expected in the 12 years following the retirement of Pastor Siegfried Köhne.

Long term planning remains notoriously difficult as the training of our students sometimes takes longer than expected, or students fail to complete their studies. Vacancies will need to be approached as they arise and patience will need to be exercised. This scenario is, of course, not completely new. The God who has provided before, will provide again. We trust him. Vacancies do, however, also provide opportunities for more lay involvement, which needs to be encouraged and accepted by members of congregations.

6.2 Students of Theology

Presently studying in Germany are Martin Paul (Wittenberg), Roland Johannes (Greytown), Matthias Hohls (Pretoria), Marlon Hiestermann (Wittenberg). Engaged in their BA-Studies at the University of Pretoria (UP) are Christian Straeuli (Pretoria), Andreas Albers (Pretoria) and Martin Paul (the brother of Helmut Paul who started his studies in 2010). Thomas Beneke (studying in German) is a student of the *Lutherische Kirchen Mission* (LKM).

Under the tutorship of Pastor Rüdiger Gevers, Kurt Paul (Pandult) is doing the DELTO-course (*Distance Education Leading to Ordination*). By the end of this year he should reach the “first step” of the study course. At that point he can be installed as a student vicar. Mr. Paul has, however, indicated that at this stage he does not envisage entering the full-time ministry, but would prefer to fill the position of a “lay preacher” (under

continued supervision). As such he could be called upon to do devotions, opening of meetings, or services when pastors are on leave. As the constitution of the FELSISA does not use the term “lay preacher”, it would need to be amended to make the necessary provision. In the mean the regulations for “Second Career Pastors” (par. 8.2) would apply.

7. Statistic

For the first time in many years the number of synodical members has increased during the past two years (2008 and 2009). It increased by 12 members. We are grateful for this increase as a further decline was expected due to more emigrations. The increase may be attributed to the FELSISA crossing cultural and ethnical boundaries. For this we are grateful.

8. Contact with other Congregations and Churches

8.1 International Lutheran Council (ILC)

From 26-31 August 2009 President Ahlers and wife attended the meeting of the ILC held in Seoul, Korea. Despite his imminent retirement, he was requested to continue to serve as editor for the ILC-News, the official newsletter for confessional Lutheran Churches worldwide. The FELSISA has also received an invitation to attend the 4th ILC World Seminaries Conference in the USA, from 3-7 June 2010.

8.2 Lutheran Church in South Africa (LCSA)

Although no official meetings were held between the LCSA and the FELSISA in the past two years, there were various times when the leaders met. Unfortunately president (em) Ahlers could not attend the synodical convention of the LCSA, held in Klerksdorp in December 2009. Pastor Harry Niebuhr extended a word of greeting from the FELSISA. During this meeting Dr. Wilhelm Weber was elected as bishop of the LCSA. His installation took place on 21 March 2010. I both attended and officiated at the installation. We wish both Dr Tswaedi and Bishop Dr. Weber God’s blessing and grace for the road ahead.

8.3 Selbständige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche (SELK)

In December 2009 Bishop Hans-Jörg Voigt visited South Africa and also held talks with the Synodical Council of the FELSISA. He also attended the signing of the LTS Shareholder Agreement. I myself have received an invitation to attend and read a paper at a Symposium of the *Lutherische Theologische Hochschule (Lutheran Theological Seminary)* in Oberursel on the topic *The Leuenberger Concordia within the inner-Lutheran conflict* scheduled for the end of November 2010.

8.4 Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELKSA-NT)

The FELSISA received an invitation to attend the Church Synod of the ELKSA-NT in October 2009. As vice-president of the FELSISA I attended and also extended a word of greeting. During the Church Synod Pastor Horst Müller (Pretoria) was elected as bishop. He responded positively to an invitation to attend the Synodical Convention of

the FELSISA. In the past two years there were no official talks between the two church bodies. However various people within Synod have expressed the wish that talks should be resumed.

8.5 Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Diepkloof (EELC)

A proposal to admit the EELC as an associate member of the FELSISA has been tabled by the Synodical Council. In the past two years the respective leaders met three times in Fairlands, Randburg, and in Diepkloof for official talks. In 2008 Pastor Georg Mabe also accepted an invitation to attend the Church Councillors meeting in Greytown. Some of the executive members also attended the meeting of the English-Afrikaans District in 2009. Congregations of the FELSISA have been kept informed on developments through its official newsletter, the *Bekennende Lutherische Kirche (BLK)*.

8.6 Evangelical Lutheran Congregation (ELC)

The ELC is the congregation that gathers on the campus of the *Lutheran Theological Seminary* in Tshwane (LTS). It is being served by Pastor Axel Wittenberg from the *Lutherische Kirchenmission*. The congregation was founded by the efforts of the *Arcadia Lutheran Mission (ALM)*. Services are held in English. The congregation was formally constituted in December 2009 and is presently considering which Confessional Lutheran Church to join. For this purpose it had already invited me as early as May 2009 to make a presentation on the FELSISA.

9. Concluding remarks

God was gracious to us in the past two years. It was an undeserved grace. Through the proclamation of his Word, in particular the saving grace in and through his Son Jesus Christ, and the administration of his Sacraments, he has kept and strengthened us in our faith. All glory and praise be to him. But the synodical council would also like to express its gratitude to you, the members and friends of the FELSISA, for the contributions you have made. In our congregations we are repeatedly surprised by undeserved works of kindness and a commitment to synod seldom seen elsewhere. In difficult economic years the commitment was greater than ever.

The years that lie ahead seem to be very challenging. But it is during challenging times that our faith is refined and Christ-like values are rediscovered. With Christ as the Lord of the Church we look into the future with confidence eager to follow him wherever he leads us. We pray for unity and his Spirit on our lives and that we will more fervently than ever seek to fulfil his commission to make disciples of “all” nations.

Respectfully submitted by
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