

# “Justification and the crossing of boundaries”

**SYNODICAL REPORT**  
**to the**  
**58<sup>th</sup> REGULAR SYNODICAL CONVENTION**  
**of the**  
**FREE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD IN SOUTH AFRICA (FELSISA)**

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

## 1. **Introduction**

Two years have passed since the previous Synodical Convention of the FELSISA. In many ways it was a landmark Synod.

Firstly, in the history of the FELSISA it was the first time that the Synodical Convention was chaired in English. As English is not the first or even the second language of most delegates at Synod it wasn't always easy to express oneself. Most delegates of course realised that change of language was not an agenda of certain individuals but rather reflected the changing disposition of the FELSISA. Whereas the delegates made an effort to embrace the change, in particular the realisation that the Church of Christ in general and the FELSISA in particular is to be a home for *all people*, others have struggled.

Secondly, the Convention 2010 marked the almost unanimous decision to admit the *Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church* (EELC) from Diepkloof (Soweto) into Synod. The congregation was welcomed as an associated member into Synod with a song of thanks to God. But again the diversity of culture and language, in particular how these would affect some of the traditional and long standing synodical festivals, such as the Brass Band and Choir festivals, elicited much heated discussion within the congregations of Synod. The Synodical Council is of the conviction however that the challenges provided by the diversity of culture and language, and indeed also the inherent fears of a future where each step is not always spelled out clearly, are not to be determinative in its decision-making. In our constitution we declare that we are “bound to the Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament; [as] the infallible Word of the triune God inspired by the Holy Spirit as the sole source and guiding principle of Faith and Doctrine” (1.1.1.2). In short this means, as we grapple with a variety of challenges in an ever-changing world our decision-making is to be informed and guided by *Scripture alone*. Only if that *basis* has been established the discussion can shift to matters of structure, administration and the like. Our spiritual reflection is to focus on the *basis* or the *foundation* of our Christian faith.

## 2. **Spiritual reflection on the topic**

“Justification is the article by which the church stands and falls.” This exact phrase is attributed to the Lutheran theologian Balthasar Meisner, who in turn said that it was a “proverb” of Martin Luther. We don't have a record of Luther using that exact phrase, but something similar: “Because if this article [of justification] stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses” (WA 40/3.352.3). Those are profound words that direct our thoughts to the heart of the Gospel that God declares the sinner righteous before him, based not on the works he does, but on the salvific work of Christ on the cross as an act of pure grace, which we receive by faith alone.

This article is the central or chief article of our Lutheran Confessions. All other articles are centered or based on it. In the Augsburg Confession (CA) it constitutes the 4<sup>th</sup> article, the first three articles leading to it, the rest proceeding from it. That man is by nature sinful (Article II) and cannot fully trust and obey God, makes Christ's work of atonement on the cross a necessity for man to be reconciled with God through the forgiveness of sins (Article III). Based on this very act of redemption man is declared righteous before God, that is, he is "justified" by grace (Article IV). This free gift from God is received by faith. However even faith is not a work of man, but is created *by God* in our hearts. This he does through the office of the Ministry (Article V), the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of his Sacraments, leading to a new Obedience (Article VI) shown forth in the fruits of faith. It is within the Church (Article VII & VIII) that Christ nurtures this faith and provides fellowship in and through his savings treasures: His Gospel and His Sacraments. However, not any Gospel will do, but only the Gospel that is purely taught alongside correctly administrated Sacraments, Baptism (Article IX) and the Lord's Supper (Article X). The key to the correct teaching and administration is (again) none other than the article of Justification, God's gracious act of declaring the sinner righteous. This act is the core of the Gospel message and also the core of what God so graciously provides us with in his sacraments.

For us in the FELSISA this is not new. We confirm and confess the centrality of the article of Justification. The question is to what degree this confession guides us and determines us in our everyday decision-making as we hear the call of Christ and endeavour to follow him faithfully.

This very topic I hope to explore by de-theorising it and placing it firmly within the context of Saint Paul's expository statements, in particular his letter to the Galatians.

It is generally known that Martin Luther was not a theorist who developed his teachings within an academic community that was disengaged from everyday life in the world. Since his youth he struggled with the question where to find a gracious God, realising that all his efforts to live a God pleasing life that would provide him access to heaven was tainted by sin. This very question drove him into the monastery and propelled his intense study of Scripture. It was in particular his reading of Paul's letter to the Romans that he began to realise that since Christ's work of atonement the "righteousness of God" was not to be read as Law (a demand of righteousness *from* man), but as Gospel (a promise of righteousness *to* man).

Intense scholarly research on Paul's letters in recent decades has however brought some facets of justification to the fore that has placed this article in a context which makes it all the more relevant for discussions presently taking place within the FELSISA. I refer in particular to what in scholarly circles has been called *The New Perspective on Paul*.

Let me at the outset state: As most new perspectives also this perspective is controversial and has been critiqued in particular by many Lutheran scholars - and rightly so. But then again, injustice is served when the baby is thrown out with the bath water. There are a variety of facets to this research and, as noted by others, there is hardly one *New Perspective* (singular) but probably as many perspectives (plural) as writers exposing it. Especially controversial is the ongoing debate on the meaning of Paul's use of the Greek word *pistis* (faith). Whereas faith has always been interpreted as a "trust" in Christ for salvation (cf. Eph. 2:9), some scholars have concluded that the most common meaning was "faithfulness", that is a commitment to God. Such a *pistis*, although worked by God, is nevertheless an act that implies "human effort" and leads to works that on judgement day will testify to the existence of faith. As such the works are the effective signs that the Spirit of Christ has been at work in the believer. Many verses in Scripture seem to

support such an interpretation, but one needs to guard against the inherent danger of a shift in trust away from “Christ’s” work of atonement to the works that he creates within “us”.

As already intimated, my particular focus falls on the “everyday context” of Paul’s statements on justification. The focus is on Galatians, primarily due to the context in which justification features in that letter, but also as it is older than Romans and presents us with the first time that this major theme of justification is sounded by Paul. The context may help us to understand better the way in which Paul formulated this theme, but hopefully it will also reveal *why* it meant so much to him and why it was so central to his theology. The key verse is Galatians 2:15-16:

We who are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is not justified by works of law, except through faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have believed Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law, because by works of law no one will be justified.

Even amongst the critics of *The New Perspective(s) on Paul* there seems to be wide-ranging consensus that the context in Paul’s letter to the Galatians differs quite radically from Martin Luther’s own context when he explored this topic. As noted above already, Luther explored justification in the light of his torturing question on how to obtain salvation. It was therefore also a natural corollary to see Paul’s opponents (the Jews) through the grid of the early sixteenth-century Catholic system of *merit*. Whether the latter was indeed the case can be debated, but there is no doubt that the context that Paul addresses in his letter to the Galatians differs from Luther’s. Whereas Luther grappled with the question of individual salvation (What must I do to be saved?), Paul uses “justification” to legitimise the mission amongst Gentiles and the unity of God’s people (Why are Jews and Gentiles no longer divided?). *It is a missional context.*

It might be helpful to sketch the context in broad strokes.<sup>1</sup> The immediate preceding context of Galatians 2:15-16 is the unhappy incident at Antioch. The Gentiles in Antioch had been accepted fully into the circle of those Jews in Antioch who believed that Jesus was God’s Anointed, rejected by their own people, but raised by God from the dead. At Antioch the custom was that all those who were baptised would share a meal in common - Jews and Gentiles together. Table fellowship was a form of close fellowship. But then certain individuals (most probably prominent figures) from Jerusalem arrived (2:11) who found it unacceptable that the Jewish Christians had disregarded the food laws laid down by Moses - clean or unclean food, proper slaughtering procedures, etc. Whatever these men said, it had an effect resulting in Peter, Barnabas (Paul’s mission associate) and all the other Jewish believers withdrawing from the table fellowship. This they did presumably to demonstrate their continuing covenant loyalty. But on doing so Paul confronted Peter accusing him of hypocrisy, that is, not remaining true to the Gospel. In front of all Paul then appeals to Peter: "If you, a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to judaize (live like a Jew)?" (2:14). This is then followed by the above quoted two verses on justification (2:15-16).

Interestingly Paul starts off by appealing to something that is generally accepted by all natural Jews, in other words a view held not only by Christian Jews but *all Jews*, namely: "... a man is not justified by observing the law." It is this very sentence that has raised the suspicion that maybe Martin Luther and the other Reformers in their dealings with the 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic church and its systems of merit in order to obtain salvation had transferred this onto 1<sup>st</sup> century

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows I rely primarily on James Dunn’s essay *The New Perspective on Paul*, originally published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol.65, 1983, 95-122

Judaism. The Law, it is being argued, was not given to the Israelites in order to enter into a covenant with God, but rather as an *expression* of this covenant. The initiative was always God's and his choosing of Israel above all nations was always a divine act of grace. God's justification is thereby not something to be attained, but it is a covenant status freely given - all Jews know this.

In the light of this, the "works of the law" were not to be seen as a means to *attain* covenant status (based on a system of *merits*), but rather as "identity markers" (or "badges") that identify you as already belonging to the covenant. In fact, this distinguished the Jews from the Gentiles. In Gentile religion "works" were invariably necessary to draw closer to god. This is intimated by Paul when he says: "We who are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is not justified by works of law."

It may be justifiably deduced that by Paul's reference to "works of law", 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish readers in Antioch would have thought in particular of (1) circumcision and (2) food laws - Israel's two main identity markers, with possibly a third (3) being the observance of special days and feasts (Gal.4:10). These identity markers were deeply ingrained in Jewish life. It set them apart from others and no devout Jews would easily ignore them. Likewise these "identity markers" were widely recognised by others. Roman and Greek writers such as Petronius, Plutarch, Tacitus and Juvenal all noted that "circumcision, abstention from pork, and the Sabbath" were typical observances that marked out the practitioners as Jews.

But what happened in Antioch? Paul is not criticising the Jews for their "works of the law". In fact, adherence to these works is not deemed to be wrong at all and at no point does Paul discourage such adherence. To put it in simple terms: If a Jew wants to be circumcised, he can do so. If a Jew wants to abstain from certain foods, he can do so. As noted, they were the peculiar rites which marked out the Jews as that peculiar people - in some way similar to the customs that identify the different cultures today. We all know that there are certain characteristics and cultural observances that identify the "German" South African, likewise also all the other cultures in our country. The same is also true for the setting *within* the church, where the Christian faith can be expressed through the vehicle of various cultural practises and customs that have proved to be helpful.

But - and this is the crux of Paul's argument at Antioch - the identity markers may not be used to *justify separation*, that is, Jews consciously abandoning table fellowship with Gentiles in support of "national" identity or because in sharing table fellowship its specific identity markers are muddled. When that happens the central article of faith, "justification by faith in Christ alone", is disregarded and in fact renounced. You have moved away from the sphere of God's grace. The seriousness of the matter calls for a public denouncement. And this is exactly what Paul does.

However let it be noted again, Paul does not exclude a "cultural" or "ritual" expression of faith as such. But when cultural and ritual expressions become the *cause* for separation (thereby in effect becoming an ethnical or racial expression), then what initially was juxtaposed in a complimentary manner within the Jewish faith (works of the law as an expression of belonging to God) are posed as straight alternatives in Galatians 3:16: "We ... are not justified by works of law, *except* through faith in Jesus Christ." From possibly being one identity marker for Jewish Christians among other (circumcision, food laws, Sabbath), "faith in Jesus as the Christ" becomes the "primary identity marker", which in fact renders the other superfluous.

From that point on Paul develops in an increasing manner Christ not only as the central but the only identity marker, both in his letter to the Galatians and all other letters. He becomes acutely aware that although the “works of law” are not wrong, strict adherence to them in a degree that results in *separation* (you are there, we are here) poses the threat of establishing an “own righteousness” that is not by faith in Christ (cf Rom.10:13). To the Corinthians he therefore writes: “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor.2:2). In his letter to Philippians he “rubbishes” his typical Jewish identity markers of the past (“circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew amongst Hebrews...”) and declares:

I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.... I want to know CHRIST and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection of the dead. (Phil.3:8-11)

It should be noted that in the missional context of Galatians, the way Paul exposes justification it renders not only that someone (an individual person) is declared “right” before God through the forgiveness of sins, but also that this person is now a member of God’s (new covenant) family to which both Jews and Gentiles belong: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according the promise” (Gal.3:28-29). In Christ the promise given to Abraham that “all people on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen.12:3) is fully realised.

Justification is indeed the core of the Gospel message, the article on which the church stands or falls, not in its theoretical proclamation, but in the everyday life of the church and its missional context of bringing Christ to all. This article we need to internalise. As we do so boundaries will be crossed, epitomised by the life of Jesus himself. He ate with the tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). He healed the servant of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). He spoke to a Samaritan women (John 4). Indeed that such boundaries can be crossed across cultural, racial and ethnical divides characterises the church of Christ. What is not possible in the world, so vividly exposed by the politics of our country both present and past, is made possible through Christ. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (Jn 13:35).

As repeatedly noted, it is only when the cultural expressions of faith begin to supercede Christ or are used to justify the separation of God’s people, or the “badge” becomes the primary identity that they are rejected by Paul. Nowhere are the “works of law” (= identity markers) *as such* rejected. The FELSISA is and is indeed becoming increasingly a church of many languages and cultures. On the one hand its unity in Christ needs to be celebrated joyfully - a mixture of languages and cultures that enrich the church. May I call this the “primary celebration.” But likewise there is room for specific culture and worshipping God in a form peculiar to that culture, a “secondary celebration.” The first may find its place primarily on a synodical level, where all congregations of the FELSISA gather. The second may be more localised and confined to individual congregations. In the Pietermaritzburg area the primarily English speaking congregations have organised an annual combined Mission and Song Festival, which hopefully will be used increasingly to also reach out into the local community. Welcoming as this is, it does not replace a gathering of all congregations of the FELSISA, where we jointly praise God and celebrate the unity in Christ. The annual Brass Band and Choir festivals have historically served this purpose. Although these have grown out of the German heritage, it is heritage if shared that can only be enriching.

The lingual and cultural diversity of the FELSISA is indeed something to be celebrated, but also calls for sound leadership and a Christ-like attitude of regarding the other more important than oneself. It is in giving that we receive. Indeed being part of a multi-cultural “church” means: No culture *wants* to dominate over the other - least of all the strong over the weak (cf Rom.14). Instead everyone looks at the interest of the other (Phil.2:4), is completely humble and gentle bearing with one another in love (Eph.4:2). And every effort is made to keep the unity of the Spirit (Eph.4:3).

The synodical council in its many decision-makings and also the pastors of the FELSISA in compiling a *Value, Mission and Vision Statement* have largely endeavoured to be guided by this article of Justification and encourage all members of Synod to engage this “chief” article of our Lutheran Confessions in all of its deliberations.

### **3. Overview of events since the previous Convention**

#### **3.1 Resolutions of the last Synodical Convention**

##### **3.1.1 Support for the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS)**

At the 2010 Synodical Convention a motion was tabled for Dr. D. Reinstorf to be appointed as a part-time lecturer at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. This motion was declined by a majority vote. As a result Dr. Reinstorf’s call to become the Pastor and shepherd of the Immanuel congregation in Pietermaritzburg was accepted. The relocation from Cape Town to Pietermaritzburg took place on 23 December 2010. With this relocation the office of the Bishop (Dr. Reinstorf being elected as Bishop in 2010) moved to Pietermaritzburg, 15 Greenwood Road, Boughthon.

The motion to support the LTS financially with an annual amount of R150,000.00 was carried by majority vote. This donation to the LTS was not designated for any specific purpose, but rather to support the LTS in general in its effort to provide theological training for the *Lutheran Church in Southern Africa* (LCSA) and other Lutheran Churches in Africa whose students study at the LTS. The FELSISA is a member of the LTS.

In the past two years huge strides were made at the LTS. Special mentioning needs to be made of (1) the Agreement signed with the University of Pretoria (UP) on 8 June 2011, (2) a strategic planning workshop with Lee Crocket from the USA in May 2012 aimed at greater financial sustainability of the LTS, and (3) the envisaged arrival of Prof. Dr. Werner Klän from Oberursel in October 2012 as a faculty member at UP tasked primarily with Lutheran post-graduate studies. A full report on the LTS will be presented at this Convention by the chairperson of the Board of Directors, Dr. Gunter Rencken.

##### **3.1.2 Admission of Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church (Diepkloof) (EELC)**

After amendments to the constitution were accepted to make provision for “associated membership” to the FELSISA, the Synodical Convention 2010 accepted the EELC as an associated member. Subsequently, based on the outline presented to the synodical convention, an “Associate Membership Agreement” was drafted by the Synodical Council and signed in Diepkloof on 26 July 2010. Basically the agreement stipulates that the EELC can participate in all structures of the FELSISA, albeit without voting rights. As it takes full responsibility for its financial affairs, including “maintenance and livelihood” of its pastor, it is exempted from paying

synodical levies, but nevertheless commits itself to make an annual voluntarily contribution to Synod. In 2011 the FELSISA received a generous donation of R20,000.00 from the EELC, this despite the fact that the EELC is presently engaged in expanding its own facilities with the building of a church hall and additional classrooms. The agreement is valid for a transitional period of 8 years, during which effort is to be made to reach full membership, which remains the explicit goal of the EELC.

### **3.1.3 Synodical Structure**

A motion was accepted to investigate whether the present synodical structure still serves the vision and deployment of FELSISA, which may or not include a name change. This task was delegated to the *Finance Commission* of the FELSISA, which in particular was tasked to look at the levy system of the FELSISA so that “large” congregations like the EELC can gain full membership without unduly burdening such a congregation financially. The report of the Finance Commission, including its investigation into the sustainability of providing a “defined” pension benefit for its “older” pastors, as proposed by St. Paul’s congregation, Pretoria, will be given later.

### **3.1.4 Calling procedure**

A revision of the calling procedure of pastors is almost a standard item on the agenda. During the 2010 Synodical Convention two motions to further investigate these procedures were carried, with the directive that the investigation should be incorporated into that of the structure of the FELSISA. The two motions in themselves represent the two positions presently being debated in the FELSISA in varying degrees. The one side would like to see greater involvement by the Synodical Council, possibly leading to a planned rotation and “placement” of pastors with the congregations having little or no say. The other side would like to refine the present constitution in such a way that the calling congregations are more involved and that procedures should be set in place that once called a pastor should be obliged to accept such a call. As the investigation into a new structure of the FELSISA is still at an infant stage, the matter has not been addressed in detail. Instead, based on various reactions received in the past two years, the Synodical Council is proposing a minor amendment to the calling procedure without making any wide ranging changes.

### **3.1.5 Policy review on the admission to Holy Communion**

The motion tabled by the St Peter’s congregation, Vryheid, regarding a policy review on the admission to Holy Communion in particular with regard to visitors from other churches not in fellowship with the FELSISA, was referred to the pastor’s convention. That this motion was accepted unanimously by the Synodical Convention shows that there is a real need to see whether changes can be made that are within the realms of Scripture and continue to bear joyful witness of what we as confessional Lutherans believe, teach, and confess regarding Holy Communion. The pastor’s convention engaged this topic on all three of its conventions since 2010. As this topic is presently being debated in most confessional Lutheran Churches, the pastors of the FELSISA relied primarily on theological papers prepared and published by its partner churches and engaged individual theologians with the revised policy that is being presented to the 2012 Synodical Convention. The revised policy forms part of the Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA, which was reworked in totality (with minor amendments) and unanimously accepted by the 2012 Pastor’s Convention of the FELSISA.

### 3.1.4 Other Resolutions

A “Memorandum of Understanding” was signed between the FELSISA and the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC) stipulating the “active service” of Missionary Christian Tiedemann in the FELSISA. Based on the amended definition of “pastors in active service of the FELSISA”, Missionary Tiedemann has been accorded voting rights at the FELSISA Conventions.

A request to prepare a biblically founded document on the separation between the FELSISA and the ELCSA (N-T) was referred to the Synodical council. The request was noted, but in the light of the policy reviews on Holy Communion, such a document could as yet not be prepared. It should be noted however, that the Synodical Council holds the view that should such a document be published again, it should be prepared not unilaterally but as a combined effort of both churches. A short report on relations with the ELCSA (N-T) will follow later in this report.

The suggestion to conduct the Synodical Convention in such a way that delegates must not take two days leave, was received positively by the synodical council and led to the decision to hold the 2012 Synodical Convention on a Friday and a Saturday.

All other resolutions by the 2010 Convention were executed as decided upon.

## 4. Events in the FELSISA since the previous Synodical Convention

### 4.1 Work of the Synodical Council

Since May 2010 until June 2012 the Synodical Council had 11 meetings. As in the past it made effort to have these meetings in various congregations of the FELSISA so as to meet with the respective church councils to discuss both congregational and synodical matters. Meetings were held in Wartburg, Pretoria, Shelly Beach, Lüneburg, Wittenberg Randburg and Pietermaritzburg.

Having served for many years, both lay members of the Synodical Council have indicated that they would not stand for reelection at 2014 Synodical Convention. As the loss of both members in the same year could impact negatively on the work of the Synodical Council, Dr. Manfred Johannes has announced that he would step down in 2012. Based on paragraph 1.7.1.15.2 of the FELSISA constitution a substitute needs to be elected at this Synodical Convention (2012). The election will be valid until the next elective convention in 2014.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to both lay members on the Synodical council, in particular Dr. Manfred Johannes. Dr. Johannes served on the Synodical Council for 14 years, since 1998. It was always a pleasure to work with Dr. Johannes for whom no effort was too great. He served the Lord and our Synod with total dedication. May God reward him for all his efforts and bless him richly.

### 4.2 Pastor’s Convention

The first Pastor’s convention took place shortly after the Synodical Convention 2010. It was held in Panbult from 16-18 August 2010. As already noted, at this convention a first draft policy review on the admission to the Lord’s Supper was presented. The focus at this convention was however on congregational growth, its mission and outreach. At the same convention the *Explanations and Guidelines for Ecumenical Meetings*, which had been in preparation for a

number of years already, were after some minor amendments accepted and are being tabled at this Synodical Convention for adoption. Also discussed was a *Statement on Homosexuality*, consisting of various thesis'. In February 2011 the Synodical Council released this statement to all congregations of the FELSISA as a "discussion document". Each church council was to decide how and if at all this statement was to be discussed in their respective congregations. A paper on Racism within the church was presented by Deputy Bishop D. Schnackenberg. It raised awareness on how language both reflects and influences our actions towards others, with an appeal that as Christians in the FELSISA we should at all times refrain from using derogatory language or stereotyping. The intent is to publish a paper on racism. Let it be noted however that racism is not confined to our country or even to one particular race, but is a problem world-wide and has been addressed by most partner churches of the FELSISA. We should do the same. This paper also highlighted the need to engage the pastors of our sister church, the LCSA, more. Subsequently an invitation was sent to Bishop W. Weber to have a combined FELSISA/LCSA pastor's conference biannually.

The 2011 Pastor's convention was both a productive and most enjoyable event. It took place on the Reinstorf Game Farm, Impalabos (East), just outside Hoedspruit from 15–18 August. The theme of the convention was: *Determining Core Values and Developing a Mission Statement for the (Pastor's of the) FELSISA*. As this was the first Pastor's Convention that was attended by Pastor Georg Mabe (Diepkloof) and Pastor Dr. Walter Winterle (Cape Town) it was held in English (for the first time). Apart from addressing a number of issues that had already been tabled during 2010, the rest of the time was used almost exclusively in determining core values and formulating a clear mission statement for the FELSISA. The workshops were aptly lead by Pastor Matthias Albers (Pretoria). As noted repeatedly by Pastor Albers, the exercise of reflecting on our core values and what the mission of the church is, is far more valuable than the document in which these are summarised.

From 7-9 May 2012 the Pastor's convention was held in Randburg (ELF). Apart from an encouraging presentation on *God's Mission* by Dr. Mike Rodewald (LCMS - US Missions regional director for Africa), the convention concentrated on the reworking of the Life Norms and Values of the FELSISA and other matters that needed completion before the Synodical Convention 2012. One of these matters was the Pension Fund of the FELSISA. It is generally known that "defined benefit" provided to the elder pastors of our synod has resulted in a huge liability. If the membership of Synod remains the same or drops it will become very difficult to service this liability through the ever increasing top-up fund. As a result suggestions are being made, and calculations have been done, on "buying out" the present crop of active pastors still in the defined benefit fund. In principle the pastors have agreed to this.

#### **4.3 Church Councillors Meeting**

It has become a routine to hold the synodical Church Councillors Meeting at the FELS-Retreat just outside Paulpietersburg, with a fellowship braai on the Friday evening. Meetings are always held during the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of November.

In 2010 the meeting was held in German and focussed on the "road ahead" for the FELSISA. This was in part triggered by a sermon on Eph 2:14-22 held at the brass band festival in Kirchdorf earlier that year, which acknowledged in gratitude towards God the increasingly changing multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic composition of Synod. This keynote address by Bishop Reinstorf was followed by a talk on God's assurances in uncertain times by Deputy Bishop D. Schnackenberg. At the same meeting it was suggested by the Synodical

Council that Church Councillors Meetings should be presented alternatively on a synodical level (for all congregations of the FELSISA) in English and (every second year) on a regional level (for a cluster of congregations) in a language that is prevalent in that region. Being a small synod and church councillors from different regions not often having an opportunity to share ideas and fellowship together, it did not gain a majority support.

The theme of the 2011 Church Councillors Meeting was: “In search of the values that drive our ministry.” A presentation by Bishop Dr. Reinstorf on the *Values, Mission and Vision* prepared by the Pastor’s of the FELSISA, was then followed by a similar presentation given by Rev. Herbert Mueller, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-president of the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* (LCMS) entitled: Witness, Mercy, Life Together. Both presentations reflect the effort of the church to provide focus to their ministries based on Scripture alone.

#### 4.4 German-District Survey

During the 2010 Synodical Convention a motion was tabled that the present arrangement that each congregation may decide on the use of language at synodical festivals (brass band- and choir festival) should be terminated and that in future these festivals should be presented in the German culture and language only. This motion was not seconded and therefore did not carry. Subsequently however the same congregation that had tabled the motion, requested the Synodical Council in 2011 to make a survey within Synod regarding the formalisation of a German District. On request from the Synodical Council a lengthy motivation was provided. In essence the German District was to be formed so that all synodical festivals, including youth and children Bible camps that historical evolved out of the German heritage of the FELSISA should in future be presented by this district in the German language and culture. Whereas all language groups would be welcomed to attend these “meetings”, the other language groups would be encouraged to arrange similar meetings in their language and culture to be supported by all. Such language based gatherings could then also be used more effectively for outreach purposes. As the Synodical Council was concerned that a negative outcome of the survey could alienate the congregation even further, it engaged with the leaders of the congregation. The intent was always to address the *concerns* behind the survey and to hopefully address these *jointly* to avoid a win-loose-situation. Part of this effort resulted in the motion on “Synodical festivals and diversity of language within the FELSISA” to be tabled at this Convention. The survey itself showed that a majority of German speaking congregations or groups do not support the formation of a German District, but there is clearly a need for cultural diversity within Synod, i.e. that opportunities are created, be it on a congregational or regional level, for people of the same language and culture to gather, both to worship God and to reach out in their communities. The tabled motion by the Synodical Council hopes to address this positively not excluding further deliberations on this topic within the gratefully accepted unity of the one Spirit of God that extends beyond all divides.

#### 4.5 Synodical Finances

A financial report will be given later by the treasurer of our Synod, Mr. Berno Niebuhr. As always we would like to extend our immense gratitude to both Mr. Niebuhr and his secretary, Mrs. Rina van Leyveld for their work. It should be noted that in many years of serving Synod, the day to day finances, preparing financial statements and providing the audit through PricewaterhouseCoopers Mr. Niebuhr has never charged any fees. We are equally grateful for the work of Pastor Harry Niebuhr (Fairland), co-opted by the Bishop, to prepare the synodical budget and to make various calculations from time to time (top-up payments to all pensioners,

reconciliation for congregations, medical aid contributions, etc). Also Mr. Ronald Paul needs to be mentioned, who prepares salary payments for vicars and various pastors.

With regard to the auditing of the FELSISA financial statements it should be noted that in the past these were qualified based on the omission of the pension obligations that Synod has to retired pastors. As these have been calculated and need to be included now, Mr. Niebuhr has requested that the Synodical Council approaches somebody else to audit the statements in future. Mr. Bodo Meyer (Pretoria) was approached who agreed to serve as synodical auditor of the FELSISA.

A motion has been prepared to establish a “FELSISA Assistance Fund”. The initial capital of this fund are to be the proceeds from the ex-FELS charitable trust. The establishment of this fund was made necessary on realising that once the proceeds of this fund had been transferred into Synod, the original mandate of the founder and donors of the fund could no longer be fulfilled.

As always the Synodical Council wishes to express its gratitude to all congregations of Synod for their timely transfer of synodical levies

#### **4.6 FELSISA Newsletter and Website**

Due to the increasing work-load of the Bishop, Pastor Michael Ahlers (Kirchdorf) has been approached to serve as editor of the FELSISA Newsletter. The first edition of the 2011 newsletter, both in German and English/Afrikaans, was already prepared by him with the assistance of Ms Ute Johannes. Due to work constrains Ms Johannes withdrew her assistance at the end of 2011. We extend our gratitude to Ms Johannes for her able work over many years. Assistance for Pastor Ahlers needs to be found, all the more so since his relocation from Vryheid/Newcastle to Kirchdorf.

Through the effort of Pastor Harry Niebuhr all FELSISA Newsletters since 1946 (then called “Berichte”) have been scanned and are available in pdf format, enabling a “word search” of all letters. Pastor Niebuhr also scanned all Minutes (and if available all Documentations) of the FELSISA Synodical Conventions since 1892 as well as various other booklets. As a Synod we are eternally grateful to him as it helps us both to do historical research and recapture decisions taken in the past.

The FELSISA Website is also enjoying a “face lift”. After the departure of Pastor Josef Henning, Pastor Tobias Ahlers (ELF - Randburg) has accepted responsibility for the design and upkeep of the Website, with Deputy Bishop Dieter Schnackenerg providing the link to the Synodical Council. The Website has been totally re-designed. The address remains the same: [www.felsisa.org.za](http://www.felsisa.org.za)

#### **4.7 Associations in the FELSISA**

In 2010 an “Organist Association” was founded under the chairmanship of Mr. Ernst-Heinrich Johannes (Panbult). Mrs. Ingrid Paul (Panbult) is the vice-chairperson and Mrs. Anita Hohls (Greytown) the secretary. The main aim of the Organist Association is to promote church music, to seek new organists and also to arrange courses for them. Meetings are held annually and all organists are encouraged to attend. An “Organist Fund” has been establish. Transfers can be made to the FELSISA, with the reference: Organist’s Association. The congregations of the

FELSISA are encouraged to support this fund, possibly with a “Thank offering” on the Sunday Jubilate.

The Brass Band Association had its annual meeting on 10 March 2012. As deputy choirmaster Mr. Heinz Niebuhr (Kirchdorf) was elected. He replaces Mr. Erhard Niebuhr (Lüneburg), who we thank for his dedicated service over many years. Mr. Ernst-Heinrich Johannes continues as the chief choir master. Mr. Roland Böhmer (Durban-Westville) and Mr. Wolfgang Böhmer (Pretoria) are the other members on the committee.

As members of Synod we thank all those involved in the various associations of the FELSISA, most of whom will give a separate report at the Convention.

#### **4.9 Missions**

At the 2010 Synodical Convention the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC) presented a report in which an invitation was extended to the FELSISA to become part of an MLC Board to coordinate the mission activities in Southern Africa, with the Bishops of both the LCSA and the FELSISA to serve on the board. This expanded involvement was welcomed and with the acceptance of the report approved by the FELSISA. Since then various meetings of the MLC Board have taken place. The MLC Representative, Rev. Christoph Weber, will report more extensively.

Most congregations of the FELSISA have been involved in missions in their immediate surroundings. With thanks to God it has been noted that various congregations have elected “mission committees” to actively promote the spreading of the Gospel and to provide support to local pastors and congregations of our partner church. In 2012 Pastor Helmut Straeuli (Durban) also accompanied Dr. M. Rodewald (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod - MS World Missions) on an exploratory trip to Malawi to see in what way an emerging confessional Lutheran Church can be supported. Such a trip may not yield immediate results, but it widens the vision of the FELSISA and strengthens it through valuable experiences gained.

### **5. Events in the Congregations**

#### **5.1 Pietermaritzburg**

As already noted, after the Synodical Convention 2010 Bishop Dr. Reinstorf (Cape Town) accepted a call by the Immanuel Congregation, Pietermaritzburg. The relocation from Cape Town to Pietermaritzburg took place in the week before Christmas 2010. He was installed as the pastor and shepherd of the congregation on 9 January 2011. Apart from providing the Immanuel congregation with a pastor and shepherd again, the relocation to Pietermaritzburg has provided Synod with a more central “Office of the Bishop.”

#### **5.2 Cape Town**

When it became apparent that Dr. Reinstorf would be relocating to Pietermaritzburg, negotiations started on acquiring a new pastor for the St. Thomas Congregation in Cape Town. As the FELSISA had a shortage of pastors, effort was made to look for a pastor from one of the FELSISA’s Partner Churches. Through the help of regional director of LCMS-World Missions, Dr. Mike Rodewald, a call was extended to Dr. Carlos Walter Winterle, former president of the Lutheran Church in Brazil, who at that time was serving as a missionary in Nairobi, Kenya. The

FELSISA was very grateful when this call was accepted, the work permit was secured, and the arrival of Dr. Winterle and his wife, Lidia, was confirmed in the first week of January 2011. His installation took place on 23 January 2012. Since then Dr. Winterle has been a great blessing to the congregation and to Synod in general. A service agreement of five years has been signed - until December 2015. LCMS-WM took the responsibility for relocation costs.

In the past the salary of the pastor in St Thomas congregation was largely financed by Synod, initially by the additional ministers fund. With the arrival of Dr. Winterle levy calculations were adapted to those applied to the rest of Synod, with the employment costs now being carried by the congregation. As this led to a steep increase, an annual grant of R135 000 was made available to the congregation. Since then St Thomas congregation has elected a “finance committee” that has made various suggestions on reducing its dependancy on Synod, hoping to reach its goal of financial sustainability in five years. Also being addressed by the congregation is the acquisition of the parsonage (10 van Gogh Street, Panorama) presently owned by Synod. As improvements are being made on the parsonage by the congregation, there was a sense of urgency in acquiring this property from Synod. As it has always been the policy of Synod to transfer ownership of property to congregations, the Synodical Council has assured St Thomas congregation that Synod has no intention to sell the property and would be willing to negotiate sale and transfer of the property in future. The Synodical Council has, however, suggested that as a first step the congregation should focus on reducing its annual grant, then to be followed by the acquisition of the property.

### **5.3 Wittenberg**

After his retirement at the end of 2009 President (em) Ahlers continued to serve Wittenberg congregation until April 2011. The extended service of president (em) Ahlers is hereby recognised and as a Synod we express our sincere gratitude to him and his wife Renate. In June 2011 the congregation called Vicar Helmut Paul as its pastor. He was ordained into the office of the ministry and installed as the pastor and shepherd of Wittenberg congregation on 17 July 2011.

### **5.4 English Lutheran Fellows (ELF)**

After the departure of Pastor Josef Henning to the USA in January 2011, the ELF congregation managed to acquire the service of retired LCMS Pastor Alfred Ebel (and his wife Nancy) for a period of six months. It was a blessed time for the congregation, who then called Vicar Tobias Ahlers to be its pastor and shepherd. Vicar Ahlers was ordained into the office of the ministry on 14 July 2011 (in Durban-Westville) and installed as pastor and shepherd of the ELF congregation on 31 July 2011.

It should be noted that the ELF congregation has always rented a house for its pastor. Initially the house next to the church was rented, but with the departure of Pastor Henning, this property was lost to other tenants, so that with the arrival of Pastor Tobias Ahlers and his wife Walda a new house was rented in Linden. As this house is up for sale and a relocation is envisaged, there have been tentative talks within the ELF congregation on acquiring an own parsonage. Unfortunately however property prices in the greater Randburg area are exceedingly high. Although not having been approached by the ELF congregation yet, the Synodical Council has given some thought on providing such congregations with a “loan”, reflected in its proposal of a “FELSISA Charity Fund”.

## 5.5 Kirchdorf

Due to the vacancies in Synod, the Kirchdorf Congregation and Pastor Siegfried Köhne came to an agreement, that he would serve the congregation for an additional year after his official retirement date at the end of November 2010. He served the Kirchdorf congregation faithfully for 18 ½ years. Apart from his congregational ministries (in Panbult/Newcastle/Vryheid, Shelly Beach and Kirchdorf) he also served Synod in numerous capacities. For 14 years he served on the Synodical Council, the last four (2000-2004) as Vice-President of Synod. As we haven't had the opportunity before, we would like to give thanks to Pastor Köhne and his wife Meira for their dedicated service in Synod for 33 years. We pray for God's continued blessing on their lives.

With the imminent departure of Pastor Köhne, the Kirchdorf congregation extended a call to Pastor Michael Ahlers (Vryheid and Newcastle). The call was accepted and Pastor Michael Ahlers was installed as the pastor and shepherd of Christ-Congregation Kirchdorf on 29 January 2012.

## 5.6 Vryheid and Newcastle

After Pastor Michael Ahlers accepted the call to Kirchdorf, the congregations of Vryheid and Newcastle called Pastor Rüdiger Gevers (Panbult) as their pastor and shepherd. Pastor Gevers was installed in Newcastle on 22 April and in Vryheid on 13 May 2012.

## 5.7 Panbult

With the departure of Pastor Gevers to Vryheid and Newcastle the Panbult congregation called Pastor Matthias Albers (Pretoria) as its pastor and shepherd. He accepted the call. His relocation to Panbult is to take place in the week of 16 July 2012. As the pastor of Panbult congregation, Pastor Albers will also serve the Afrikaans speaking congregation of Piet Retief. His installation is set for 22 July 2012.

## 5.8 Pretoria

2011 was a year of many challenges for the St Paul's congregation in Pretoria. In 2006 it was directly involved in establishing the *Arcadia Lutheran Ministries* (ALM) a combined mission initiative of St Paul's, the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC), the *Lutheran Church in Southern Africa - Gauteng Diocese* (LCSA) and the *Lutheran Theological Seminary* (LTS). This mission initiative resulted in the establishment of the *Evangelical Lutheran Congregation* (ELC) on the premises of the LTS. As this congregation is in close proximity of St Paul's and as St Paul's carried the vision of an English ministry, the ELC approached St Paul's for membership in 2011, with the request to change its structures in such a way to accommodate it as a third language group in St. Pauls. This request was preceded by various preparatory talks between the two church councils and thereafter by wide ranging discussions within the congregation. At an extraordinary meeting of the congregation held in September 2011 the request of the ELC was not accepted, instead a counter proposal carried that a task team, elected by the congregation, should investigate the matter further. As Missionary Axel Wittenberg (Pastor of the ELC) will be returning to Germany in mid-June 2012, St Paul's agreed at a subsequent meeting to provide pastoral care to the ELC. However since that meeting, Pastor Matthias Albers (St Paul's) has accepted a call to the Panbult congregation and the ELC has approached the Synodical Council of the FELSISA for associated membership. The Synodical Council responded positively to the request and has formulated a proposal to Synod, which among other also refers to a proposed

agreement to be reached with the MLC (and the LCSA) to provide the ELC with a pastor on a fixed short-term contract. Associated membership of the FELSISA and an agreement with the MLC will provide more time for considerations on the future of the ELC, either as an independent congregation of the FELSISA or as a third language group within the structures of St. Paul's.

After talks with the church council of St. Paul's, the church council has indicated its willingness to wait for the calling of a pastor until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Theological Exam of Vicar Martin Paul, whose name can then be added to the list of call candidates. As a result the Synodical Council has decided that immediately after the conclusion of his 2<sup>nd</sup> Theological Exam (on 24 July 2012) Martin Paul would continue with his vicarage in Pretoria (under the supervision of Pastor Klaus Damaske) until such time when he receives a call. Calling procedures in St. Paul's will commence immediately after this Synodical Convention.

## **5.9 Kempton Park**

Calling and financing a pastor for Kempton Park has not materialised. This congregation has in the past few years, since 2007, been served by Pastor Klaus Damaske (Pretoria). The departure of Pastor Matthias Albers from Pretoria will surely impact on the continued service that can be provided by Pastor Klaus Damaske. Considerations on the future of the congregation will have to be made.

## **6. Visitations**

Before the relocation of the Bishop from Cape Town to Pietemaritzburg (December 2010) no visitations were held. After the signing of the "Agreement of Association" and shortly before his relocation, the Bishop did however attend the Confirmation Service of the EELC (Diepkloof), with more than 25 children being confirmed in their faith.

In 2011 the congregations of Greytown and Uelzen were visited. Both congregations have Sunday services in both German and English. The trend is that of dwindling numbers amongst the German members and slight increases amongst the English membership. In 2012 the EELC (Diepkloof) was visited. Bishop Reinstorf was accompanied by Dr. Manfred Johannes. The congregation is a vibrant mix of people of different languages, very active in their community. The EELC has completed the first phase of erecting a church hall, including classrooms for its many children. Most impressive are the innovations shown in raising these funds. Equally impressive was the uplifting atmosphere of the service with more than 300 communicants and more than a 100 children receiving the blessing. There was in-depth consultation with Pastor Mabe, the church executive and church council, the women's league and also the youth. A challenge to the congregation is the provision of a full-time pastor. Pastor Mabe is a full-time teacher and can hardly provide the congregation with the necessary pastoral care. The congregation is, however, blessed with a great and active leadership amongst the laity. The visitation highlighted the clear need of the EELC - after years of isolation - to be part of and totally involved in all structures of the FELSISA.

## **7. Personnel Situation**

### **7.1 Vacancies, Pastors and Vicars**

The report above on the congregations has shown a huge shuffle of pastors in the FELSISA. With the exception of Kempton Park, the only position presently vacant is that of St. Paul's (German), Pretoria. Once Vicar Martin Paul receives a call, all positions should be filled. In the next few years two pastors will be going on retirement: Pastor Chris Johannes (Greytown) in October 2014 and Pastor Dr. Winterle (Cape Town) in December 2015.

Thankfully two students of theology should be returning soon. Earlier this year Heinz Hiestermann completed his 1<sup>st</sup> Theological Examen in Oberursel, Germany. Based on his excellent thesis, the Synodical Council had granted him permission to enrol in doctoral studies, realising the need of a qualified theologian in the ranks of the FELSISA. Although he initially intended to do his doctoral studies in Frankfurt, Germany, latest indications are that he will return to South Africa and complete his studies at the University of Pretoria. As a result he is available to begin his internship in the FELSISA in January 2013. Also nearing the completion of his studies in Germany is Roland Johannes. He could start his internship in March or April 2013. Both students of theology are married. A final decision on their placements still needs to be made. As there won't be any vacancies until October 2014, and extended vicarage is envisaged for both students, which could provide Heinz Hiestermann the opportunity to complete his doctoral studies.

## **7.2 Students of Theology**

Presently studying in Germany (apart from Heinz Hiestermann and Roland Johannes) are Mathias Hohls (Pretoria), Marlon Hiestermann (Wittenberg), Andreas Albers (Pretoria) and Christian Strauli (Pretoria). Engaged in their BA-Studies at the University of Pretoria (UP) are Martin Paul (Panbult) and Markus Peschel (Kirchdorf). Mr. Peschel started his studies in 2012. As he has no matric exemption, he could not enrol in a Bachelor of Arts (BA), but was accepted in the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) course. In contrast to the 3 year BA course, the BTh is a 4 year course that includes a number of theology modules. Requirements for the Office of the Ministry for the Reformed Churches is the completion of the BTh followed by a Masters in Theology (MTh). As the LTS in Arcadia also presents a BTh (fully recognised by UP since 2012) Mr. Peschel has been encouraged to continue his studies at the LTS from 2013. Once he has completed the BTh successfully, the Synodical Council will consider additional requirements before he is admitted into the vicarage programme of the FELSISA.

It should be noted that in contrast to many other churches in South Africa the FELSISA is extremely blessed with the number of students it has.

## **8. Statistic**

The trend of a slight increase in membership in the years 2008 and 2009 continued in 2010, with an additional membership of 35, i.e. 1.3%. However 15 members were again lost in 2010, totalling 2674 members. Effort on the part of the Synodical Council to determine both the reasons for "loss" and "gain" of membership gave no conclusive answers. Losses were registered through marriages, relocation or disinterested members whose names were removed from the official list.

It should be noted that apart from the Great Commission of the Lord, growth is imperative for the future well being of the FELSISA. We therefore encourage Synod to embrace the Mission of the FELSISA as prepared by the pastors: A synod that moves forward with Christ:

TRUSTING, WELCOMING, CARING! May all congregations of Synod go out into their communities and bring Christ to “all”.

Not reflected in the above statistics is the membership of the EELC (Diepkloof), which registered a membership of 2678 in 2010 and 1958 in 2011. This difference is attributed to better accounting practises. Since 2010 special effort has been made by the EELC to determine the number of (involved) members of the congregation.

## **9. Contact with other Churches, locally and internationally**

### **9.1 Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA)**

#### **9.1.1 Moving closer to one another**

On 25 October 2011 a joint meeting of the Church Council of the LCSA and Synodical Council of the FELSISA was held in Pretoria. Present was also Rev. H. Mueller, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President of the LCMS. At this meeting the Synodical Council was presented with a letter, dated 23 September 2011, in which past relationships were acknowledged and an invitation was extended by the LCSA to the FELSISA to join with it in one united Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. The Synodical Council of the FELSISA acknowledged the goal, which it shares with the LCSA Council. In the ensuing discussion various suggestions were made regarding the road ahead, in particular defining steps that can be taken on the road towards a united church. Based on the ideas exchanged the Synodical Council made the following suggestions in a letter, dated 8 February 2012, to the LCSA Council: (1) At least one annual meeting between the LCSA Council and the Synodical Council of the FELSISA, starting in October 2012, where, among other, possible structures and models of a United Church can be discussed, and (2) a biannual combined Pastor’s Conference starting in 2013. The latter would possibly be supported with funding from the LCMS. In the mean time a letter, dated 5 May 2012, with a basic working draft of models for a United Church was received by the Synodical Council. A date for a combined meeting of Church Councils has not been set. Amongst the church leadership there seems to be general agreement that for the vision of a United Church to be realised, all congregations will have to be financially independent and self sustainable and manage all employment costs of the pastor. Naturally all congregations of the FELSISA will have to be consulted before any decisions can be made. More complex is the debate on how such a new structure can be introduced for the FELSISA and how current liabilities of the FELSISA (Pension top-up, medical aid contributions for pensioners, support for smaller congregations, etc), can be serviced, both for its own congregations and possibly for all congregations of a United Church in future. Other “interim” models can also be considered. Already in the late 1980s a “Draft Constitution of the Conference of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (CELCSA)” had been drawn up between the LCSA and the FELSISA. Lessons can also be learnt from other Churches in the Southern African context on the road to Church unity. In Namibia, for example, a “United Church Council” of the three independent Lutheran Churches has been established. It should also be noted that the debate on how the confessional Lutheran Churches in South Africa can be “structurally” united, does not in any way diminish the “spiritual unity” that is already given in Christ and verbalised in the official establishment of “Church Fellowship” and the Partnership Agreement that exists between the LCSA and the FELSISA (cf. Paragraph 14.2 of the Constitution and Bylaws of the FELSISA).

#### **9.1.2 Symposium on “Mission and Apartheid” and the establishment of a joint Study Group**

This topic is introduced here as it relates to improved relationships between the Confessional Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa. History has taught us that efforts for reconciliation are often hampered not only by actual atrocities of the past but often by false perceptions and assumptions. These perceptions and assumptions are compounded if the opportunities to talk about and to reflect on the past are not given.

“Apartheid” became a discussion point when in 2003 the LCSA put nine questions to the *Lutheran Church Mission* (LCM) concerning the attitude and the work of the mission in South Africa during the apartheid era. These were honestly answered by the Mission Director, Rev. Markus Nietzke, and published in its newsletters. The “Questions and Answers” paved the way to speak openly about the events, pains, sins and also misunderstandings of the past. They also provided the *Lutheran Theological College* (LTH) in Oberursel with the impetus to hold a symposium on the topic “Mission and Apartheid” in November 2011. Although not directly involved in the discussions that were taking place, the FELSISA received an official invitation to attend the symposium as well. With the Bishop committed to other duties, the Deputy Bishop Dieter Schnackenberg was commissioned to attend and also to present a paper. Subsequent reflections on the symposium were very positive. For some presenters of Africa being able to speak and having ears that listened, was in itself a healing process leading to improved relationships. But the symposium also highlighted the need of proper research that would counter false assumptions and prevent unfounded accusations. As a result a “Study Group” with representatives from the LCSA (Dr. David Tswaedi and Mr. Peter Ntsoe), the FELSISA (Pastors Dieter Schnackenberg and Matthais Albers) and the MLC/LCM (Missionary Christoph Weber and Prof. Dr. Werner Klän) was put together to gather and evaluate historical sources. The assumption that the study group is involved in politics needs to be rejected. Its focus is not on the state and its failures in past and present years. It has but one goal: To work towards reconciliation and improved relationships *between the confessional Lutheran Churches*. This is done in the realisation that we human beings (on all sides) continually sin against one another and are in need of God’s forgiveness and the forgiveness we speak to one another. This exercise is to be embraced with thankfulness towards the God who reconciled the world to himself through Christ (cf 2 Cor.5:18-21).

### 9.1.3 Salary administration of Bishop Dr. Weber

A contentious issue over the past few years has been the administration of the Dr. Weber's salary, who presently serves both as rector of the LTS and Bishop of the LCSA. In June 2000 Dr. Weber, then Pastor of the FELSISA congregation Wittenberg, received a call by the LCSA to serve as a lecturer at the LTS and in doing so left the services of the FELSISA and thereby terminated his “Service Contract.” As the LCSA could not cover Dr. Weber’s employment costs, a new “Service Agreement” was negotiated and signed in 2001 for three (3) years between the LCSA, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod- World Missions (LCMS-WM) and the FELSISA. In short the agreement stipulated that LCMS-WM would make a salary-grant available for the benefit of Dr. Weber according to the FELSISA salary scale. The FELSISA in turn - on request from LCMS-WM - would (as a gesture of good will) “administer” the salary (the grant being transferred to the FELSISA). The LCSA was to be responsible for housing. This agreement was not renewed after three years. In 2009 the arrangement officially came to end when on 30 June 2009 LCMS-WM discontinued payments to the FELSISA, opting to rather make a general grant available in support of the LTS. As the LTS at that point was not registered as an employer, the Board of Directors approached the Synodical Council to continue with the administration of Dr. Weber's salary, the LTS transferring the necessary funds (from its general fund) to the FELSISA. In 2010 Dr. Weber became Bishop of the LCSA. As the LTS continued to provide for his full

salary, the LTS Board of directors requested the FELSISA to continue with salary administration until other arrangements can be made.

However since 2009 the Synodical Council under the chairmanship of President Ahlers expressed its concern about the present situation. Apart from the fact that no agreement has been in place since 2004, questions have been raised on the effect - short and long term - that such an arrangement may have on the LCSA or the LTS if the salary of one particular person is administered by the FELSISA, but not those of others (present and future). There are also concerns of a possible “legal” nature. The present Synodical Council became aware that in order to administer the salary of Dr. Weber his registration as an employee of the FELSISA was never discontinued, despite him being member of the LCSA since the end of 2000. This matter clearly needs to be addressed and rectified.

As the LTS has recently registered as an employer and indeed salary payments to all staff members are made by the LTS, the Synodical Council has served notice that the administration of Dr. Webers salary by the FELSISA will be terminated at the end of its financial year 2012. This should provide the LTS (or the LCSA) with enough time to make arrangements for the payment of Dr. Weber's salary.

It needs to be stressed that this decision is taken purely on the grounds of good and responsible governance. As in the past the FELSISA is totally committed both to the LTS and its relationship to the LCSA and is most grateful and supportive of the work done by Dr. Weber both as rector of the LTS and Bishop of the LCSA.

## **10. Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK), Germany**

As our students of theology study at the college in Oberursel, Germany, there have always been very close ties between the SELK and the FELSISA. The good relationship was highlighted by two visits to Germany in the past two years. Bishop Reinstorf received an invitation to present at the Symposium of the *Lutheran Theological College* (LTH) in November 2010 on the topic of the Leuenberg Agreement. The essays have just been published in a book entitled: *Die Leuenbergerkonkordia im innerlutherischen Streit*, with Werner Klän and Gilberto da Silva as editors (Ruprecht Edition). And in June 2011 both Bishop Weber (LCSA) and Bishop Reinstorf (FELSISA) attended the Church Convention of the SELK, held in Berlin, Germany. Both visits also culminated in a visit of the FELSISA students of theology.

## **11. International Lutheran Council (ILC)**

### **11.1 ILC World Seminaries Conference**

The 4<sup>th</sup> World Seminaries Conference of the ILC (a meeting of Lutheran teachers and Professors) was held from 3-7 June 2010 at the Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (USA). The topic was: “Confessional Lutheran Identity in Light of Changing Christian Demographics”. The conference highlighted the shift in Christian population towards Africa, South America and the East Asian countries. Notable is also the influx of Hispanic’s into the USA, a trend that could lead to more Spanish than English speaking Americans by the year 2050. Whereas the politicians oppose this trend, it was refreshing to see how the LCMS considers ways of reaching the Hispanic population with the Gospel and even preparing (now already) for an LCMS that may have more Spanish than English speaking members in future. The conference was still attended

by Bishop Reinstorf, but there is a need to identify another theologian within the FELSISA to attend these conferences in future.

## **11.2 Meetings of the International Lutheran Council (ILC)**

In June 2012 Bishop Reinstorf attended the ILC Africa Regional Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. It served the purpose of consolidating the ILC Churches in Africa and also considered how the confessional Lutheran Churches can reach out into Africa. In discussing various pressing theological issues the meeting also served as preparation for the International meeting to be held from 16-21 September 2012 in Ontario, Canada. The meeting in Canada will focus on the Word of God. Bishop Reinstorf has been tasked to hold a series of four Bible Studies.

It should be noted that the FELSISA pays an annual fee (based on membership numbers) to the ILC. But all travelling expenses to ILC meetings and conferences are sponsored by the ILC.

## **12 European Lutheran Conference**

Invitations in 2010 and in 2012 to attend the meeting of the European Lutheran Conference in Portugal and France could not be followed. The necessity to attend these meetings of European Confessional Lutheran Churches (at least occasionally) is recognised by the Synodical Council of the FELSISA.

## **13. Hermeneutic Symposium in Australia**

In October 2011 Bishop Reinstorf, on invitation from the *Lutheran Church of Australia* (LCA), attended the Hermeneutic Symposium at the Faith Lutheran College in the Barossa Valley (just outside Adelaide). He had the opportunity to respond to two papers. A detailed report was given in the Newsletter of the FELSISA (04/11).

## **14. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA-NT)**

Despite the wish expressed by many within the FELSISA for more formal talks with the ELCSA-NT these unfortunately did not materialise in the past two years. This can only be ascribed to the over-loaded schedule of both church leaders. The relationship between the two leaders has been friendly and open with a willingness to work together and support one another wherever possible. Twice Bishops Horst Muller and Reinstorf met for informal visits and had an exchange of church related and theological topics, once in Pretoria and once in Pietermaritzburg. Bishop Reinstorf received and also responded positively to the invitations to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> Church Synod of the ELCSA (N-T) held in Hermannsburg from 20-23 October 2011, the centenary celebrations of the Hayfields Congregation (Pietermaritzburg) on 18 March 2012 and the 10<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) held in Cape Town from 3-6 May 2012. These meetings provide a wider horizon, give insight to the responses of others to the challenges in our country, and generally testify to the good neighbourliness that should indeed be nurtured between the different Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa, always with the intent to come to greater scriptural unity.

Some congregations in the FELSISA and the ELCSA (N-T) have raised the question whether it would be possible to formalise an agreement of pastoral care, including the holding of church services, when neighbouring congregations in both churches experience long term vacancies. Unfortunately these questions have not been formally addressed. The Synodical Council has,

however, tentatively looked at similar situations abroad where churches not in fellowship with one another have prepared “working agreements” for such cases of emergency. A basis for closer cooperation could also be the “Charta Oecumenica” signed by various European Churches, including our Partner Church, the *Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church* (SELK). Some initiative in this regard has already been shown.

#### 15. **Office of the Bishop**

This report testifies to an extremely busy synodical period, which demanded a lot of time, both for reflection and leadership on the part of the Synodical Council, in particular the Bishop. Expectations can however hardly be met with the present structure of the “Office of the Bishop”, which is confined to a single person, who also serves as a full-time pastor of the *Immanuel* Congregation Pietermaritzburg and at times needs to present internationally. In the awareness that a full time position would increase the synodical budget substantially, the Bishop has made effort to co-opt as many people as possible. And indeed he is most grateful for the wide-ranging support he has received. Synod should, however, realise that priorities will be set, highlighted by the fact that in the past two years the Bishop could not, for example, lead all information and call meetings, or even be present at the installation of new pastors... and at the same time hold regular services in his own congregation and provide pastoral care to its members. It should be noted that despite the many travels of the Bishop and hours of administration work, the Immanuel Congregation pays the Bishop’s full salary (excluding the honorarium). The congregation has done so willingly, but consideration should be given that at least part of the Bishops salary is carried by Synod, the implementation of which (within the confines of approved increases of the budget) is requested from Synod.

#### 16. **Concluding remarks**

The past synodical period was not only characterised by many challenges, but also by the support the Synodical Council received both from pastors and laity in the FELSISA. For the Synodical Council it was a comforting sign that “God was at work” in synod. There were times when challenges seemed overwhelming and no answers seemed to be forthcoming. But by the grace of God and in his own timing doors opened again and again. This effected humbleness and heightened our dependency on God and worked greater trust. The Synodical Council is well aware of its own limitations and shortcoming, but were encouraged by the many prayers spoken on its behalf. For these we express our gratitude. We are also comforted by the Watch Word 2012 taken from 2 Corinthians 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

As we move forward, we invite all members of Synod by careful study of God’s Word, to TRUST God (that is, listen to his promises) WELCOME all people, and allow the Spirit of God to work a heartfelt CARE for others. Praise be to Him alone.

TRUSTING - WELCOMING - CARING

Respectfully submitted by  
Dieter Reinstorf  
Bishop, FELSISA

Date: 20 June 2012