

LIBERATION THROUGH COMMEMORATION

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:19)

SYNODICAL REPORT to the 60th 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

Although this topic had not really been explained when Synod was convened, it has already caused some reaction. It is of course true that we as a Synod wish to reflect on our past. That is what the term “commemoration” refers to. But the intent of reflecting on the past is of course very positive. It is our hope that this reflection, even if it opens up some wounds, will lead to healing and that we, as people of God, will be set free of burdens that hinder improved relationships amongst the greater family of God. That is what the word “liberation” refers to. It is used here not with a political connotation, but rather a deeply spiritual one, captured by the word *forgiveness* leading to *reconciliation*, the core message that Christ committed to his apostles. We believe that as this healing and reconciliation takes place, we will be able to live out our calling as being “a light to the world” (Mt 5:14) better, in particular here in our beloved country South Africa, where God has placed us.

As in 2014 we have again invited two speakers, thereby reminding Synod that the primary purpose of the convention is not just a matter of administration, but rather spiritual growth as we seek to be guided in all spheres of life by God’s Word and also the Lutheran Confessions. The first speaker’s presentation precedes this report on the agenda. But as this report is being sent out before the convention, it can nevertheless serve as an introduction to the topic to be discussed.

The topic will reflect on racism and the legacy of apartheid and how it has affected us both as a Synod and as individuals. But even before we start, we should be clear what this topic is *not* about. The intent of reflecting on this topic is not to engage in a witch-hunt, where judgement is past on a previous generation. We need to be well aware that we are all sinners and that we all fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23) and that it is not our task to pass judgement on others (Mt 7:1-5). Our task is to reflect, always using God’s word as a mirror, and to allow the Spirit of God to guide us. That we are dealing with the topic now is also not prompted by any populace notion, meaning that it is the “in-thing” to do. We believe the Spirit of God is knocking on our door *because* he wants to work healing and thereby promote the good news that we are privileged to preach and hear every Sunday. Thirdly there is also no specific agenda attached to the topic in the sense that synod *must* acknowledge its sins, or *must* make restitution for wrongs committed, or that the confessional Lutheran Churches in South(ern) Africa *must* now unite to become one church. Christian life is a journey. We *follow* Christ and eagerly wait to see where he leads us, always assured by his love and his deep desire to work reconciliation.

Our appeal to synod is to listen and to engage on this topic prayerfully and with an open mind. We are well aware of course that the recent politics in our country has not made this easy. The dream of a *rainbow* nation has largely been shattered. Not only has there been a progressive increase in corruption, violent protests and murder, but also racism. We thought racism was largely buried, but it has reared its ugly head again, and indeed on all sides. That the racial slurs by some *individuals*, wrong and demeaning as they are, caused such a *national* uproar in 2016 is a sign that the efforts of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* have not yielded the wide-spread results hoped for and that racial prejudices remain deeply buried in our subconsciousness. If not dealt with properly they will continue to cause eruptions, often sparked by relative minor events. Although the present political climate has complicated what we hope to achieve within our synod, it has largely confirmed the necessity to address this topic and not to let the past rest, or to sweep it under the carpet. We sincerely believe there is healing in following God's loving directives of confessing, forgiving and reconciling.

2. Spiritual reflection on the topic

As we have two speakers who will reflect on the topic of this Synodical Convention, effort will be made to keep the *spiritual reflection* that always forms part of this report as brief as possible. This will be difficult as the topic is so diverse, with so many facets that can and should be addressed, that any approach chosen will be inadequate and possibly raise more questions than answers. Well aware of these limitations the choice is to focus on (1) the two kingdoms, followed by some, rather short comments on (2) human dignity, (3) telling stories, (4) grief, (5) the power of language and (6) reconciliation.

To reflect on the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms might come as a surprise. The choice however is based primarily on the perception that it is improper or maybe even wrong to reflect on the evils of apartheid, racism or other civil and social injustices as we are bringing politics into the church, that is, mixing the two kingdoms.

In the Augsburg Confession (CA) the doctrine of the two kingdoms is spelled out in article XXVIII, though in a slightly different context to ours today. The question that sought to be answered then was, *Where does religious authority lie?* For centuries there had been a struggle of power between the church and the state. Popes and bishops had become not merely church leaders but political figures as well, claiming the right to govern both the church and the state and to make and enforce laws in both realms. Political laws were often enforced by means of spiritual threats and political measures were often used to enforce spiritual obedience.

This struggle for power can be traced back all the way to the Old Testament. It started when our forefather in faith, the Israelites, asked Samuel, the judge, to give them a king like all the other countries around them. Samuel was hurt as he felt that he and his sons had failed to guide the people according to God's will. However God responded to Samuel, “[I]t is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected *me* as their king” (1 Sa 8:7). Here we see an instance when God's people no longer desired to be directly accountable to God, but rather desired to be accountable to a head of state, to a king, or a president (today). The people gravitated towards a king to enforce religious authority. God then warned them that a king will be politically oppressive, a *parasite*, living off the surplus of the people, taking the best of their land and crops and giving it to his attendants (cronies), taking their men to war, their money in taxes... taking, taking, taking (cf 1 Sm 8:11-18). But no, the

Israelites refused. They wanted a king like the other nations. So God gave them a king.

Saul was the first king, but soon became oppressive. He was followed by David, considered to be the greatest king of all time. But even he took what his eyes and heart desired, the wife of another man whom he had killed (cf 2 Sm 11). From this illegitimate marriage came the next king, Solomon, known for his wisdom and his desire of foreign women. He soon lost his reliance and trust in God. Thereafter everything spiraled downhill. As the kings strayed from God, so did God's people.

God always knew this would happen as kings and all human beings are by nature sinful (cf Ps 14:5; 51:5; CA II). For hundreds of years the prophets lamented the poor leadership, ungodly rule and wayward nature of God's people. But this is exactly what was to be expected when a human king, a head of state, becomes a *religious* authority. Inevitably the covenant with God was broken. New covenants were made with the government and that government became the entity to which the people were accountable to. That is idolatry and that is why God said to Samuel, "They have not rejected you, they have rejected me."

If we follow this theme into the New Testament, one of the reasons why Jesus was crucified was that he declared that people could have a direct relationship with God. This displeased of course the *religious* leaders of Israel who had widely assumed *political* power in Israel. According to Jesus the people no longer had to make sacrifices in the temple, follow the many strict ordinances of the priests, or obey the Pharisees and Sadducees to receive forgiveness of sins. They could simply confess their sins to God and receive forgiveness. "It is not to men that you are accountable to," Jesus said, "but to God." The devil (tempting Jesus in the desert) and many of Jesus' followers, including his closest disciples, wanted to make Jesus a political *king*. But he resisted.

Many have declared that the church was at its purest when it was young and persecuted by the Roman government. It was driven by its Christ-like values and refused to submit to the ungodly demands of the government. There is wide agreement amongst historians that the church, ironically, became corrupted when the government became *Christian* and the Roman Emperor Theodosius I declared *Christianity* to be the state religion. Strictly speaking having an earthly king as its ruler again, the church became infected and corrupted by dirty politics and money.

The corruption continued into the 15th century. At that time the Roman (or Western) Catholic Church was governed by popes who claimed that they had supreme authority in both the temporal and spiritual kingdoms. Popes and their bishops served as secular princes, ruling territories (papal states), commanding armies and playing the game of power politics with other European leaders. The intertwining of the temporal and spiritual authorities was most egregious by the purchase of bishoprics by princes, who then ruled their territories as both temporal and spiritual rulers. The introduction of indulgence, by the way, was part of an effort to repay a loan that Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg had entered into.

The fusion of powers is most apparent in the history of our country. During the rule of the *National Party* state and church strictly speaking became one. At one point the positions of prime minister and leader of the Dutch Reformed Church were occupied by two brothers, the church being a direct ally to the government. South Africa was declared a *Christian* country and National *Christian* Education was implemented. But when the state, despite goals that initially might have been defendable, became corrupted and introduced discriminatory laws, the church no longer had a voice.

Martin Luther was the first western Christian who clearly advocated for a separation between church and state. The separation of spheres was a direct result of his rediscovery of the apostle Paul's teaching on "justification by faith (alone)" (Ro 3:22). Luther insisted that the Scriptures were the only source and norm of doctrine, not the pope or an earthly king. It is from this insight that the doctrine of the two kingdoms emerged.

The biblical origin of this doctrine can, among other, be traced back to Matthew 18, John 18 and Romans 13. In short it can be summarised like this: Jesus, at the right hand of God, rules over all the earth (Mt 28:18). Everybody should therefore humbly submit to him. No man is to be god. On the one hand (his right hand) God rules over the church through his Word and Sacraments. On the other hand (his left hand) he rules over the world through the agencies of government. As both spheres belong to God, both need to be acknowledged as God's gifts and blessings. The primary task of the kingdom to the right is to forgive sins or to withhold forgiveness (The Powers of the Key). The authority given to it is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments (CA XVIII, 8). The primary task of the kingdom to the left is to preserve civil justice and peace. Its authority is exercised through the sword (CA XVIII, 11). These two kingdoms need to be clearly separated. Failure to do so corrupts both.

The separation of power however does not mean that the church is no longer allowed to speak out against the state when there is civil injustice or widespread corruption. In fact it is its duty. Jesus did it all the time. The *law* part of God's Word certainly includes judgements on moral and ethical issues facing a nation. In that sense the church needs to be a voice against the violations of God's will (Ac 5:19). It is *obligated* to guide the state in implementing laws that promote justice and peace. Likewise the churches preaching and teaching should influence attitudes and actions in societal life, from the pulpit, in classrooms and at assemblies.

The above is to be clearly distinguished from getting actively involved in party politics. In doing so the church comprises the unique responsibility of the kingdom of the right. This in turn does not mean that individual Christians should not aspire to and train for public service. In fact the church should pray for and support Christians (and others) in their divine vocation of providing good governance. It is a tough job with multiple temptations.

In 1996, South Africa adopted its new constitution. In the Bill of Rights it declares: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion." That this clause exists can in part be ascribed to Martin Luther and his teaching on the two kingdoms and we can be grateful that South Africa has a secular democracy. It enables us as Christians the freedom to worship Jesus Christ and declare that we are accountable to Christ and Christ alone. Controversial as it may seem, we should not necessarily desire a *Christian* nation. History teaches us that a Christian nation will invariably capture and corrupt the church. This has largely happened to many *Christian* public holidays. Christmas in particular has been captured by capitalism and consumerism, celebrated even by non-Christians (and Christians for all the wrong reasons).

It is this very fusion of the two kingdoms, so vehemently opposed by Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, that has corrupted many churches in South Africa and continues to do so. In Nazi Germany it led to "passive obedience" by the church towards the state, with those who opposed the Nazi atrocities being persecuted or even executed, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffers' conviction is captured in this line: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not

to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” For this he paid the ultimate price.

In South Africa many church leaders, pastors and theologians got involved in the struggle against apartheid. Some but not all heeded the separation of the two kingdoms. Some became actively involved in party politics. Those who did and took up senior positions in the governing party after 1994, soon lost their prophetic voice. When the governing party (as all human institutions) became corrupted, they by virtue of their office within the party, found it extremely difficult to speak out against the evils within the party. The one notable exception is Bishop Desmond Tutu. When he became the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, he instituted a new requirement that all priests (including himself of course) could not be official members of a political party. This made it possible for him to criticise publically and sometimes very ferociously the atrocities of the apartheid government as well as those of the governing party today. It is for this reason that he and many critical voices within the South African Council of Churches have been widely silenced today.

The FELSISA largely followed the route of “passive obedience.” It characterised my own ministry in the years leading up to the democratic dispensation in 1994, despite the fact that while I studied in Germany I became well aware of some of the atrocities that were being committed in South Africa. Failure to acknowledge this, silently enjoying the privileges that the apartheid government afforded to us and overlooking the plights of others, dampens our Christian witness, prevents us from being a credible voice in addressing the evils of present day South Africa, and continues to burden our brothers and sisters in our partner Church, the *Lutheran Church in Southern Africa* (LCSA), many of whose members suffered severe injustices and loss of human dignity during the apartheid era.

The loss of human dignity is the next sub topic we wish to touch on. Usually when we reflect on apartheid certain laws that were introduced come to mind: The population registration act (which required that every South African be classified into one of a number of racial population groups), group areas act, pass laws, Bantu education act, natives resettlement act, and many more. It is not only that these laws deprived a certain sector of the South African society of certain rights and privileges, where to live, where to own land (if any), where to go to school or where to sit. The hurt goes far deeper. It boils down to a loss of human dignity. I am not recognised as a full or equal human being. My skills and abilities are not recognised. I am deemed to belong to an inferior race incapable of achieving what others can - all based on the colour of my skin and ethnicity.

Father Michael Lapsley, originally from New Zealand, who arrived in South Africa as a young Anglican missionary in 1973 writes in his book *Redeeming the past*: “Nothing could have prepared me emotionally and spiritually for the reality in South Africa ... I stopped being a *human being* and became a white man, because suddenly every single aspect of my life was decided by the color of my skin.” Like or not, although privileged, he was nevertheless a prisoner of the system.

So was the church. Evil was not that church services were held in separate buildings with the Word of God being preached in different languages. Evil was the loss of human dignity, when you had no choice and weren’t allowed to enter a church or a cemetery. Evil was also the deafening silence, when the deep hurt that fellow Christians experienced in our country was not noticed and a cry for help was not heard or acted upon.

This all belongs to the past, and we should move on! In fact it was Father Lapsley, at a conference

in Cape Town, who made me aware of the value of telling stories. When people experience trauma, like he himself did, losing both hands and an eye in a letter bomb attack shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela, part of the healing process is that you can tell your *story* to a *compassionate listener*. Jesus was such a compassionate listener. The healing process is of course propelled forward, when the compassionate listener is the perpetrator of the evil act, shows remorse, seeks forgiveness and voluntarily makes restitution. But the listener may not always be the offender. In such cases “confessing” can be defined as “heartfelt acknowledgment of pain.” Fact is, for proper healing to take place a safe haven needs to be created for stories to be shared, both past and present. The church of Christ should provide such a safe haven.

At the same conference in Cape Town I for the first time became aware of the role that grief plays in present day South Africa. South Africa is a country that grieves, even if we are not always aware of it. Twenty years after apartheid large groups of our South African society still grieve past losses. Visiting the District Six museum in Cape Town, a coloured tour guide, after sharing the historical details of forced removals with us in a rather matter-of-fact tone of voice, was encouraged to tell us his own story. Both he and us were moved to tears when he told us how the bulldozers destroyed his parents’ home, re-settled them in a hostile environment without schools and basic services. Today the land has been given back to them, but the scars are still visible. They lack the education to provide for an improved lifestyle and the funds to build and maintain a house, where they once lived and played in the street. There is grief.

But the whites in South Africa, in particular the Afrikaner community, are also grieving. Some of their children never returned from the war in Angola and have not adapted to normal life again. They like most members of the FELSISA, still enjoy a privileged lifestyle with good education, but due to affirmative action job opportunities are limited based on the sins of their fathers. There is hardly a white family that is not broken up through emigration. And if for the Afrikaners, South Africa isn’t home anymore, where is home? They grief the loss of a fatherland, a loss of identity. Their century old deep dream of self-determination has been shattered and now they, together with most other white South Africans, need to deal with the populace politics that make them responsible for almost all evil in our country, accompanied by threats of land grabs and much more. Listening to their stories, moved an African participant at the conference to tears, exclaiming: “For the first time I understand you better and don’t see you as the enemy anymore.” A Dutch Reformed researcher writes: “The church is stuck in unresolved issues of grief, which is the main contributor to the lack of outreach.” Pastors need to pastorally assist members of their congregation as they grapple with grief and a reality that simply will not return again. Fact is, grief (being inward focused) is hindering the church to fulfill its great commission and the many opportunities of being a Christ-light to others.

Psychologists have identified the various stages of loss and grief. Denial (leading to isolation), anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages are also reflected in the psalms of lamentation. Psalm 13 serves as an example. It starts off with (1) a lament, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me [...]”, followed by (2) a prayer “Look at me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes [...]”, followed by (3) a statement of trust, “But I trust in your unfailing love”, followed by (4) the final stage of praise, “My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord for he has been good to me.” The last stage can be reached also by us in South Africa, but not if we live in denial. In God we have a compassionate listener, a forgiver of sins, a healer of relationships.

This compassionate listener is also the one who shows no favouritism and loves all equally. What characterised Jesus and highlighted his holiness, expressed in terms of his compassion, “Be merciful, as your father in heaven is merciful” (Lk 6:36), was his engagement with the “sinners and tax collectors” and the dignity he showed them. Apart from the fact that he talked to them and ate with them, he also addressed them in a dignifying manner. The demon possessed woman has a name, Mary Magdalene. In the parable of the rich man and the beggar (Lk 16:19-31), the beggar is given a name, “Lazarus” (meaning “God is my help”). The theorist John Austin has drawn attention to what has become known as “performative speech act.” When I am saying something, it is not always just a neutral, descriptive saying, but language has the ability to do something, to perform, or make something that wasn’t there before. When the marriage officer says: ‘I speak you together as husband and wife,’ something happens. The same is true in naming persons. Within the FELSISA often derogative language is used when referring to a person of a different race, at times stereotyping the whole race based on a negative incident with an individual. This is racism and the language use is not fit for a child of God. We should learn to show dignity to all people, irrespective of their race or social standing. A garden boy or a domestic servant can be called by their names. It does something! Government officials can be addressed as “sir” or “madam” as “mr” or “mrs/ms.” The way we speak will determine the way we act. Against all expectations, God shows us dignity by calling us by our name (Is 43:7).

I wish to conclude this spiritual reflection with some final thoughts on reconciliation. Although our partner church, the *Lutheran Church in Southern Africa* (LCSA) has never addressed us directly with a request to deal with the past or even intimated that it seeks forms of restitution, we still believe that true healing of relationships will take place when people (and indeed on all sides, past and present) can tell their stories, have compassionate listeners, are eager to confess their sins and are eager to forgive. For us Christians this is or should be easy as we experience it every day in our relationship with God. We are convinced that although commemorating the past may open up some wounds, it will liberate us from a burden that we cannot carry alone. We have not mapped out the steps to be taken, but wish to follow the example of our loving God. Although in contrast to us, he had not sinned, he took the *first step* and reconciled the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor 5:19). This message of reconciliation, entrusted to us, is not only to be preached, but is to be acted out. This way the church can experience healing, become a light to the world again and a critical voice where deeds of injustice take place.

Speaking for myself, I wish to apologise for the sins and failures of the past. I was a silent voice when fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and fellow citizens in our country, were suffering. If that apology can also (in the processes that we wish to follow) be the voice of Synod, it would mean so much more.

3. Overview of events since the previous Convention

3.1 Resolutions of the last Synodical Convention

3.1.1 Guidelines on the use of alcohol at synodical events

That synod is indeed a “light of Christ” to others is important. This prompted the synodical council to raise its concerns regarding the excessive use of alcohol by individuals at FELSISA youth gatherings. The youth leadership responded positively and has set up *Guidelines for the use of*

alcohol at synodical youth events. These are being distributed to the youth regularly.

3.1.2 Secretary for the Bishop

It was suggested that a secretary is appointed to help Bishop Reinstorf with the administrative duties within the FELSISA. Bishop Reinstorf was hoping to appoint somebody from within his own congregation in Pietermaritzburg, with whom he could regularly meet, as and when the help of such a secretary is needed. No such appointed was made. Consideration should be made whether it would be viable to appoint somebody from another congregation and whether the person is to be remunerated for the work done. Needless to say, the administrative workload, as well as serving the congregation in Pietermaritzburg as its full-time pastors, provides the Bishop with less visiting and preaching opportunities elsewhere.

3.1.3 Amendments to the FELSISA Constitution

After the 2014 synodical convention the FELSISA constitution was amended and copies in pdf format were made available to all pastors.

3.1.4 Other resolutions

All other resolutions by the 2014 Convention were addressed and will be reported on either as part of this report, or in reports to be presented during the convention.

4. Events in the FELSISA since the previous Synodical Convention

4.1 Work of the Synodical Council

During the 2014 synodical convention Mr. Herbert Schulz (Kirchdorf) did not make himself available for re-election. He served on the synodical council from 2006 until 2014. Mr. Harald Niebuhr (Pietermaritzburg) was elected onto the council. Pastor Rüdiger Gevers (Vryheid) was elected as deputy Bishop. Synod would like to express its gratitude towards Pastor Dieter Schnackenberg (Lüneburg), who served on the synodical council from 2004. From 2010 to 2014 he also served as deputy Bishop.

Since September 2014 to June 2016 the synodical council had 10 meetings. Again meetings were held in various congregations, in particular to engage the local church councils. The synodical council welcomes invitations received. Apart from these meetings, the Bishop usually accompanied by another synodical council member made various other visits to congregations of the FELSISA as the need arose.

4.2 Pastors Convention

During the period of this report two pastors conventions were held, one in Hoedspruit from 17-20 August 2015 on the farm Impalabos, the other in Pongola from 8-12 May 2016 on the Farm Sitilo. We thank the hosts who made their farms and facilities available. Apart from the sermon exegesis' and the many other topics that were discussed much time was spent on the following two topics: (a) The practice of consuming the elements after Holy Communion, and (b) absolution by clergy from

laity in a public service.

The first, consuming the elements after Holy Communion is something that in the past was not practiced within the FELSISA. The focus was always on what we *receive* in Holy Communion, namely under the bread and the wine we also *receive* the true body and blood of Christ. With the consumption of the elements there is a shift in focus towards what happens when the elements, bread and wine, are *consecrated*. If indeed, as it is being argued, the body and blood of Christ are present then already, then consuming the elements rather than storing or reusing them seems to be a legitimate practice. The latter position is today accepted by many in our partner churches in Germany and the USA, where most of our students study. Within confessional Lutheranism worldwide however there is no consensus on this matter as the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion largely remains a *mystery* that cannot be explained in absolute terms. As a result both practices, that of storing the elements already consecrated and consuming the consecrated elements, are deemed to be valid practices that do not deviate from any clear instruction within Scripture. As the latter practice is rather new in the FELSISA it has raised questions amongst the laity, whether there is a substantial difference of understanding amongst the pastors of the FELSISA regarding Holy Communion. This can be discounted as there is absolute agreement that Christ is really present in Holy Communion, and that with the bread and the wine we also receive the real body and blood of Christ given and shed for us on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Pastors have therefore been requested to explain both practices within their congregations, and if they wish to consume the elements (with members of their church council) this should be done in the vestry rather than in the public service itself. Whatever practice is followed, the Communion elements should be handled with reverence that reflect our deepest conviction of the real presence of Christ in Communion.

The second topic, that of laity absolving pastors of their sins in a public service, led to an in-depth discussion. According to the constitution of the FELSISA an elected church councilor may also administer absolution to the pastor (5.6.5). This right is granted to the church councillor during the induction order. Although this practice was widely communicated, also through the FELSISA Newsletter, it seems as if the FELSISA is the only confessional Lutheran Church that follows this practice. As it wasn't without some controversies in the past and the question was raised again by some pastors within the FELSISA, the Bishop approached the Commission on Theology of its partner church in Germany, the *Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church* (SELK), to provide its official position. In short, the Commission came to the conclusion that the practice within the FELSISA is "problematic" as within the Lutheran Confessions the *Office of the Key*, that is, the commission of Christ to his disciples to forgive sins *and to withhold forgiveness* is always associated with the *Office of Ministry*. At the same time however the Commission recognised the effort on the part of the FELSISA that forgiveness of sins is spoken to pastors *regularly and in solidarity* with the other members of the congregation. As both points need to be considered carefully, there was no consensus at this point to propose an amendment to the constitution of the FELSISA. Instead efforts shifted rather to the introduction of a practice, which could address both the pastors need to acknowledge his need for forgiveness and absolution and placing the office of the key firmly within the office of the ministry. A proposal, also made by the Commission of the Theology in Germany, is now being considered to provide an alternate order for the "Confession and Absolution" in the Divine Service, whereby the pastor first confesses his sinfulness to the congregation and is comforted by words of God's mercy, before the congregation confesses its sins and receives absolution from the pastor. This is an example (which can of course be adapted):

P: I confess to God the Almighty and to you, brothers and sisters, that I have sinned with thoughts, words, and deeds: my fault, my fault, my most grievous fault. Therefore I ask you, pray for me to God our Lord.

C: May the almighty God have mercy on you, may He forgive your sins and lead you to eternal life.

P: Amen.

C: We confess to God the Almighty and to you, brother, that we have sinned with thoughts, words, and deeds: our fault, our fault, our most grievous fault. Therefore we ask you, pray for us to God our Lord.

P: May the almighty God have mercy on you, may He forgive your sins and lead you to eternal life.

C: Amen.

This alternate order would be seen as an *additional* option to be used during the Divine Services.

Some attention was also given to the Order of Service used in the English speaking congregations of our synod. Pastor Roland Johannes has proposed various minor changes to what is now the *Standard Order of Service*. But more importantly he has also been tasked to work on an alternate, more *simplified* Order of Service. This task is based on the experience and realisation that some of the smaller English speaking congregations who are not used to liturgical services have difficulty in singing parts of the *Standard Order of Service*.

Although the above topics are all important and reflect the efforts of the FELSISA pastors to remain faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, it is important to stress that the focus on reaching out into the world with the good news entrusted to us remains vital. For this reason pastors regularly share outreach programmes and activities with one another. We believe this needs to be emphasised and researched even more, in particular how the FELSISA can reach the young generation within our country.

4.3 Church Councillors Meetings

The theme for the church councillors meeting held on 7 & 9 November 2014 was *In giving we receive*. The intent of the theme was to promote joyful giving based on blessings received. It was, among other, chosen to prepare synod for the envisaged new structure of the FELSISA. Should the structure be accepted in the near future, synodical levies would be largely based on voluntarily contributions. For such a system to be successful there needs to be high level of spiritual maturity within synod, where giving is not guided by budgets and only such projects are supported, which have the donor's personal support, but rather by the joyful trust of giving back to God, what he has so graciously given to each one of us. Three group Bible studies were held. Although helpful to many, some church councillors afterwards expressed the wish to have more formal presentations.

The next church councillors meeting, held on 6 & 7 November 2015, was organised and chaired by deputy Bishop Rüdiger Gevers. The theme was *Pastors and Elders. Caring for the church and for one another*. Very insightful and helpful presentations were made by two pastors and two church councillors. It is worth noting the topic of each presentation: *Elders at work* (Pastor Tobias Ahlers), *Building trust between pastors and elder* (Edith Müller), *The challenge of the church in a self-absorbed culture* (Siegfried Haschke), and *Working within one's vocation* (Pastor Kurt Böhmer).

4.4 Synodical Finances

4.4.1 Treasurer and Auditor

The treasurer, Mr. Edmund Böhmer (Wittenberg), has delivered excellent work in the past two years (supported by Bernard Meyer). Not only are payments made and captured in time, but congregations are also regularly informed on payments received. Some, especially the smaller congregations, sometimes lack the expertise to prepare the salaries of their pastors. The synodical council did therefore discuss centralising salary payments for all pastors. But his would create even more work for the treasurer who already does his work in a honourary position. Mr Böhmer has however declared his willingness to provide professional guidance to those congregations that need help. Treasurers of these congregations are encouraged to approach Mr. Böhmer.

The auditing of the FELSISA financial statements is done by Mr. Body Meyer (Pretoria).

Our gratitude is expressed both to the treasurer and the auditor as well as all FELSISA congregations, who timely pay their synodical levies each year. The one congregation that has struggled to pay its levies is the *English Lutheran Fellowship* (ELF) in Randburg, primarily due to unpaid levies of the past, which are being carried over each year, and the purchase of a parsonage. This has been addressed by the synodical council, leading to the proposal that has been tabled by ELF.

In preparing the budget of the FELSISA and making various other calculations, the synodical council has been greatly assisted by Pastor Harry Niebuhr (Fairland).

4.4.2 Assistance Fund

The 2014 Synodical Convention approved the appointed of a Management Committee (MANCO) for the Assistance Fund of the FELSISA. The report of the MANCO forms part of this synodical report.

Appointed onto the committee were Mr. Friedel Meyer (Wittenberg), Mr. Herbert Schulz (Kirchdorf) and Mr. Udo Schulz (Pretoria). Mr. Friedel Meyer was elected as chairman. Since 2014 there was no need for the committee to meet in person as all matters could be discussed through telephonic and mail correspondence.

The car loan agreement for pastors was taken under review. From December 2014 to July 2016 year) three car loans were made to pastors. In total ten pastors have a loan with synod, as well as three congregations (Vryheid, ELF in Randburg, and the ELC in Pretoria) and the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC). Financial accounts are monitored and monthly updates are made by Mr. Udo Schulz.

The balance sheet of the Assistance Fund was last audited in 2013, with another audit being done in 2016. At the end of 2015 the loan capital amounted to R2,944,683.25, with the Assistance Fund showing a capital balance of R1,053 587.75. The MANCO is thanked for its work. Members of synod are encouraged to make donations to the Assistance Fund. The banking details are made available in every newsletter of the FELSISA.

4.4.3 Lutheran Cooperative Bank

In 2014 Mr. Andre Voigts (Kirchdorf) gave a detailed report on the establishment of a *FELSISA*

Trust. Further widespread consultation has resulted in the envisaged establishment of a *Lutheran Cooperative Bank* (LCB). Later during the convention Mr. Ralf Schulz (Kirchdorf) will report on the LCB.

4.4.4 Housing Facility

It is repeated that pastors are encouraged to purchase an “investment” property before retirement. A loan can be obtained from *First National Bank* at 1.15% under prime lending rate with the accumulated capital within the pastor’s pension fund serving as surety. The synodical council is in the process of seeking business persons within synod to assist pastors in acquiring such a property. Dr. Baldur Koch (Pretoria) has already prepared *Investment Guidelines* for pastors and has indicated his willingness to serve in an advisory capacity.

4.4.5 Pension Payout

Although it was decided at the 2014 synodical convention that the synodical council should proceed with the envisaged buy-out of all active pastors on the defined benefit fund, no progress was made due to legislative complications and delays. It should be noted however that although the affected pastors had orally indicated their willingness of a payout, these delays have caused some uncertainty as they approach retirement age. Mr. Beier will report in greater detail.

4.5 Towards a new structure for the FELSISA

Mr. Harald Niebuhr and Bishop Reinstorf did presentations on the envisaged new structure of the FELSISA in various congregations of the FELSISA between 2014 and 2016. These presentations served primarily to introduce the topic to the congregations and to gather questions and suggestions. A report will be given by Mr. Niebuhr.

4.6 Associations in the FELSISA

The children, teenage and youth associations all give separate reports to the synodical convention. However let me both emphasise the importance of youth work and express our gratitude to those who are involved in all of these associations. FELSISA, true to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, needs to be a synod that engages the young as much as possible. We should constantly ask the question how we can involve the youth more in our congregational activities (including our services) and how we can reach out better to the youth that is still outside of the church.

Mr. Harry Johannes (Panbult) stepped down as the principle conductor of the Brass Band Association of the FELSISA. Synod expresses its gratitude for his years of service. At its meeting held on 13 March 2016, Mr. Heinz Niebuhr (Kirchdorf) and Mr. Roland Meyer (Lüneburg) were elected as principal and deputy conductor respectively. The Brass Band Festival in 2017 will be held in Wittenberg, commemorating 500 years of Reformation.

It should be noted that the FELSISA also participates actively in the *Evangelical Brass Band Association of South Africa* (EBASA), with its next joint festival planned for Durban in 2020. Mr. Siegfried Prigge (ELCSA N-T) serves as chairman, Mr. Christo Appel (BBSA - Moravian Church in the Western Cape) as vice-chairman, and Mr. Ingbert Hillermann (FELSISA) as secretary.

The last meeting of the Church Choir Association of the FELSISA took place in Durban on 10 October 2016. Mr. Manfred Johannes still serves as the principle director. At this meeting the Bishop shared a vision of having biennial regional choir festivals alternating with synodical choir festivals every two years, which actively involves various language groups within synod so as to have at least one festival within synod that duly represents the whole of synod and celebrates its Christ-given unity. Time should be given to see whether such a vision receives support within synod.

The Organist's Association of the FELSISA met in 2014 (in Paarl) and 2015 (in Panbult). The Organisation aims to support the Organists of our Synod through training courses, lectures, literature and general support. Harry Johannes (Panbult) is the chairman, Ingrid Paul (Panbult) vice-chairlady and Rosmarie Böhmer (Newcastle) treasurer and secretary. Pastor Roland Johannes (Our Saviour, Wartburg) has held various workshops already.

4.7 Missions

4.7.1 Mission of Lutheran Churches (MLC) and other mission activities

In 2014 the synodical council seconded Pastor Dieter Schnackenberg to serve as the delegate of the FELSISA on the Board of the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC). The Bishop continues to attend meetings, time allowing. In the past two years the MLC has started various new projects, both inside South Africa and beyond its borders. The MLC Representative Rev. Christoph Weber will give an extensive report at the Synodical Convention.

4.7.2 Student ministry in Pretoria

The student ministry is one of those ministries where the MLC is involved in together with the *Arcadia Lutheran Ministries* (ALM). Mr. Walter Stallmann (Pretoria) is the chairman of ALM and has prepared an extensive report for the synodical convention, outlining in particular the focus, vision and sustainability of the ministry. Pastor Jacob Corzine serves as the student pastor. His service agreement needs to be renewed early in 2017. When the report is discussed, synod will be asked to affirm its commitment to this ministry, in particular its financial support. The MLC funds the repayment of the student loan of the pastor and overseas travels, with the rest being funded by FELSISA congregations and individuals. For 2016 the following pledges were made: (1) FELSISA = R167,716.00, (2) St. Paul's Pretoria = R111,810.00, and (3) ELC Arcadia - R100,000. Indications are however that when the new service agreement is signed in 2017, the ELC will no longer be able to honour its annual pledge of R100,000, with St. Paul's also considering to cap its present contribution, leaving a shortfall of about R120,000 over and above the pledged amount of the FELSISA, which is annually collected by means of voluntarily contributions from the other FELSISA congregations. The 2014 Synodical Convention had resolved to finance this ministry through such voluntary donations and that shortfalls should be covered by either applying to the Assistance Fund or using the reserves of the FELSISA. As the student ministry was launched only three years ago, the synodical council supports further funding, working towards self-sustainability, possibly through greater involvement of the laity.

4.7.3 Lutheran Hour Ministries

The *Lutheran Hour Ministries* (LHM) has closed its offices in South Africa. The funds accumulated

in the *Church Growth Fund*, originally donated by Dr. H. Eggers, has been paid out to the FELSISA. The synodical council has tabled a proposal regarding the management and use of these funds.

4.7.4 **Lutheran Education Association, South Africa (LEA-SA)**

The *Lutheran Education Association* (LEA) is an exciting global concept to reach out into the world through schools, similar to what our forefathers did who build both churches and schools at the same time. In 2014 a presentation was made at the Synodical Convention. Since then much has happened. The mission of LEA-SA, under the leadership of Lorna Böhmer (Durban-Westville), is to set up *Early Child Development* (ECD) centres in each of the approximately 1700 Lutheran congregations in South Africa. A LEA-SA model, basically a blueprint to set up an ECD, has been prepared. With this A to Z kit anyone can start up an ECD school immediately once the location and room is ready. Congregations are encouraged to approach Mrs. Böhmer.

In 2017 LEA will hold its *International Lutheran Education Association Conference* in South Africa. The provisional date has been set for the end of May.

At the same time the Concordia University Wind band (Conductor: Dr. Richard Fischer) will tour through South Africa as part of the Reformation celebrations. Concerts will be held in various cities. The provisional itinerary includes concerts, among other, in Cape Town (14 May), Pietermaritzburg (16 May), Vryheid/Augsburg (17 May), Thembisa (18 May) Pretoria and Johannesburg (20-22 May).

The request has been made that these events are well coordinated with the local committee tasked with the 2017 Reformation celebrations.

4.8 **2017 Reformation celebrations**

In 2017 churches of the Reformation will be commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Unfortunately the Lutheran Churches in South Africa have really done too little to promote this event so far. However at a meeting held in April 2016 with the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, Natal-Transvaal* (ELCSA, N-T) it was decided to call a committee of all Lutheran Churches in South Africa. The committee is to consider joint celebrations and other ways to promote our Lutheran heritage in South Africa. This committee is being chaired by Dr. Detlev Tönsing (ELCSA, N-T), with Dr. Manfred Johannes being the FELSISA delegate on this committee. A report will be compiled by him for this convention.

The FELSISA had decided more than two years ago that *internally* this event was to be celebrated at its 2017 Brass Band Festival. For this very purpose an invitation to host the event was made by Wittenberg congregation. Since then also regular essays have been published in the FELSISA Newsletter on the Lutheran Confessions.

Internationally the *Lutheran World Federation* (LWF) has announced major celebrations during its Twelfth Assembly to be held in May 2017 in Windhoek (Namibia). Apart from the “Wittenberg Project,” (see below 9.5) no official announcements have so far been received from the *International Lutheran Council* (ILC).

4.9 **FELSISA 125th Anniversary**

As already noted in the 2014 synodical report, 2017 also marks the 125th anniversary of the FELSISA, founded on 13 September 1892. Dr. Karl Böhmer (LTS in Petoria) and Pastor Roland Johannes (Our Saviour, Wartburg) have been tasked to prepare a commemorative volume with a historical overview of all FELSISA congregations. We are also most grateful for the publications of president (em) Peter Ahlers on the history of the FELSISA, based on the terms of office of each president, published in the FELSISA newsletter. These essays are to be printed in a small booklet and will be made available in 2017 in both German and English.

4.10 FELSISA Newsletter and Website

After being the main editor of the FELSISA Newsletter from 2011 to 2015 Pastor Michael Ahlers (Kirchdorf) handed the reigns over to Pastor Rüdiger Gevers (Vryheid) who is being assisted by Pastor Tobias Ahlers (Randburg) and Pastor Roland Johannes (Our Saviour, Wartburg). We thank all those involved, past and present, for the work done. Pastor Tobias Ahlers continues to serve as webmaster for the FELSISA website: www.felsisa.org.za

4.11 Study group on Apartheid

A trilateral study group on Apartheid convened for the first time in 2012 already. Since then a number of meetings have been held and summary reports sent out. These reports were also published in the FELSISA Newsletter to insure a process as transparent as possible. The last meeting took place on 8 March 2016. The work of the commission is to assist the confessional Lutheran Churches in South Africa as it reflects on the past and works towards healing. Its primary task is to publish a *reader* containing documents, statements, position papers and the results of oral research, that is, interviews with those directly affected by the apartheid policies and acts of racism. The purpose thereof is that if one talks about the past, it is not based on hear-say but real events that need to be addressed for proper healing to take place. The reasons why this is deemed to be necessary are largely covered in the spiritual reflection of this report. As in 2014 the synodical council of the FELSISA expresses its support for this study group believing that its work will promote healing and reconciliation.

5. Events in the Congregations

5.1 Associated members

5.1.1 Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC)

Just before the 2014 synodical convention the decision was taken by the EELC to employ Pastor George Mabe on a full-time basis. This news was positively received by the synodical council as it believed that it would serve the congregation well and also pave the way should the EELC in future wish to call another pastor. Unfortunately initiating this process led to a number of dissenting voices within the EELC, with accusations and counter accusations being made. After attending the Choir Festival of the FELSISA in Durban in 2015, the Bishop was informed about the strife within the EELC by Pastor Mabe, leading to visits by the Bishop in October and again for a Thanksgiving service (accompanied by Mr. Harald Niebuhr) in December 2015. Pastor Mabe's annual report early in 2016 indicated that matters hadn't improved but were escalating. In February 2016 Pastor Mabe tendered in a letter of resignation, effective 7 March. Since then various internal deliberations

and investigations have taken place to determine the root cause of the dissent. The Bishop had talks with the Executive on 13 March, and from 12-13 April 2016 a formal visitation of the congregation took place together with Mr. Harald Niebuhr, preceded by talks with Pastor Mabe and Pastor Harry Niebuhr (Fairland). The latter had been requested to serve as the vacancy pastor, tasked with setting up preaching rosters for Sunday services and also attending meetings of the church council. Although the visitation served primarily as a healing workshop amongst dissenting voices within the EELC, it did not lead to the desired result of Pastor Mabe returning to the EELC. Wishing to remain in the FELSISA Pastor Mabe and his wife, Anna, have now officially joined St. Paul's in Fairland. The EELC has also officially endorsed its membership of the FELSISA. Indications are that the congregation will remain vacant for wounds to heal and that a calling process for a new pastor will be initiated in the near future. The synodical council is tasked to make candidates available. In order to do this urgent talks will also be held with its partner church, the *Lutheran Church in Southern Africa* (LCSA).

The *Associate Membership Agreement* with the EELC was signed on 26 July 2010. It is valid for 8 years. If not full membership is accorded to the EELC after 8 years the *Associated Membership Agreement* can be renewed. The biggest challenge in the past 6 years has been to include the EELC in all structures of the FELSISA and to truly make its members feel welcome, despite linguistic and cultural differences.

5.1.2 *Evangelical Lutheran Congregation (ELC)*

The ELC is also an associated member of the FELSISA, the *Membership Agreement* being signed on 7 October 2012. As it is valid for four years, it needs to be reviewed by October 2016. Initially indications were that after four years the ELC would be able to join the FELSISA within its present structures. The last visitation of the ELC was in July 2013. Unfortunately no further visits have taken place.

There exists a *Memorandum of Understanding* between the FELSISA, the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC) and Pastor M.N Mnthambo, who serves the MLC. Pastor Mnthambo has entered into a *Service Agreement* with the MLC, which determines his rights and benefits, including his salary. The salary is reimbursed to the MLC by the ELC.

Apart from supporting the Student Ministry with R100,000 annually, the ELC has also purchased a flat in Pretoria that serves as the parsonage of the ELC.

5.2 *Greytown*

After the retirement of Pastor Chris Johannes on 31 October 2014, the congregation in Greytown called vicar Heinz Hiestermann to be its pastor. He was installed on 2 November 2014.

5.3 *Our Saviour, Wartburg*

After the departure of Missionary Christian Tiedemann to Germany, *Our Saviour* congregation (as a branch congregation of Kirchdorf) called vicar Roland Johannes as its pastor. He was installed on 28 December 2014.

5.4 Newcastle and Vryheid

For many years Newcastle and Vryheid formed a parish and were served since 2012 by Pastor Rüdiger Gevers. After the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC) approached the FELSISA, it was agreed to make missionary Thomas Beneke available to serve the (German speaking) FELSISA congregation in Newcastle and to serve as a missionary under the auspices of the MLC, reaching out to LCSA members and others in the greater Newcastle area, thereby starting also an English ministry in Newcastle. Missionary Thomas Beneke, having been ordained by Bishop Voigt (SELK) in Leipzig, Germany, on 6 April 2015, was installed as the pastor of the *Evangelical Lutheran Congregation* (ELC) of Newcastle on 10 May 2015. Deputy Bishop Rüdiger Gevers officiated. A *Mission Project* has been set up for a 5 year period. A *Memorandum of Understanding* between the FELSISA and the MLC has also been signed. Basically the ELC makes contributions to the pastor's salary and synod as in the past, the rest being covered by the MLC.

As Newcastle and Vryheid no longer constitute a parish, and the ELC in Newcastle contributes to missionary Beneke's salary, a new *Service Agreement* was signed between the *St Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation* in Vryheid and Pastor Gevers. Although it lacks the membership numbers, the congregation in Vryheid has put in a lot of effort to remain a financially self-sustainable congregation, with a focus on outreach.

5.5 Other congregations

Other congregations that were visited regularly by the Bishop and the Synodical Council were in particular Uelzen and the *English Lutheran Fellowship* (ELF) in Randburg. The Pastor of ELF, Tobias Ahlers, continues to serve as the vacancy pastor of the congregation in Kempton Park.

6. Visitations

In the past synodical period visitations took place in Wittenberg, 11-12 April 2015, Pretoria, 17-18 October 2015, and Diepkloof, 11+12 June 2016. The Bishop was accompanied by Mr. Harald Niebuhr. After each visitation a report is prepared with observations and recommendations. Generally the Bishop requests congregations to extend an invitation for a visitation to counter the perception that he only visits congregations to mediate in matters of conflict. The visitations provide an opportunity to exchange experiences and are aimed to uplift congregations by providing them with a new focus.

7. Personnel Situation

7.1 Vacancies and Pastors

All positions within the FELSISA are presently filled. On 2 November 2014 Vicar Heinz Hiestermann was ordained and installed as the pastor of Greytown congregation. Vicar Roland Johannes was ordained on 29 November 2014 in Lüneburg and installed as the pastor of *Our Saviour* congregation on 28 December 2015. Missionary Thomas Beneke was installed as the pastor of Newcastle congregation on 10 May 2014.

In October 2014 Pastor Karl Böhmer submitted his doctoral dissertation to the *Concordia*

Theological Seminary Fort Wayne (CTTSFW), Indiana, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Klaus Detlev Schulz. The degree was officially conferred on 27 February 2015, with the graduation ceremony in Fort Wayne on 22 May 2015. His dissertation was published in 2016 in the series *Oberurseler Hefte* (editor Prof. Dr. Werner Klän) under the title *August Hardeland and the “Rheinische” and “Hermannsburger” Missions in Borneo and South Africa (1389-1870)*. With the support of the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC) a one year fixed term Contract of Service was entered into with Dr. Karl Böhmer to serve as a lecturer at the *Lutheran Theological Seminary* (LTS) in Tshwane in 2016. Should synod approve his secondment to the seminary, the Contract of Service with the Seminary is to be renewed. The employment of Dr. Böhmer at the LTS was made possible by Pastor Dr. Walter Winterle who entered into a one year-fixed term Service Contract with the MLC and the FELSISA. He continues to serve the congregation and Cape Town and works as a missionary in Mozambique under the auspices of the MLC. It is hoped that this contract can be renewed for 2017. Expenses relating to the renewal of Pastor Dr. Winterle's work permit were paid by the FELSISA.

Pastor Heinz Hiestermann (Greytown) has completed his doctoral dissertation in New Testament studies at the University of Pretoria, with a successful defense on 6 July 2016. His graduation will be just before this synodical convention on 2 September 2016.

Pastor Nathan Mnthambo (ELC) has commenced his doctoral studies at the *Concordia Seminary (CSL, St. Louis)* in the USA. He continues to serve the ELC in Arcadia (Pretoria) but travels annually to the USA for block lectures.

It may also be noted that Pastor Jacob Corzine (Student Ministry) is in the process of completing his doctoral studies in Germany and that also Missionary Christoph Weber (MLC) has enrolled in a doctoral course at the *Concordia Theological Seminary Saint Louis* in the USA. We congratulate all candidates and trust that the research done will promote the work of the church and mission in South Africa.

We express our condolences to the Schroeder family with the passing away of Pastor (em) Eckart Schroeder.

7.2 Students of Theology

The FELSISA is indeed blessed with an abundance of students of theology. Marlon Hiestermann is busy with his final exams at the *Lutherische Theologische Hochschule* in Oberursel (Germany). Should it be completed successfully he will return to South Africa, together with his wife Kristin, on 26 September 2016. He will commence his vicarage at the beginning of November 2016 and should be ready for a call in January 2018.

The other students of theology with prospective dates of completion are: Andreas Albers (March 2018), Christian Straeuli (March 2018), Martin Kurt Paul (March or October 2019), Markus Peschel (2020), Werner Straeuli (2020), Philip Wortmann (2022), Robert Schnackenberg (2023). The latter two are still engaged in their BA studies at the University of Pretoria. The rest are studying in Germany, with the one exception being Markus Peschel, who has been accepted at the *Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines* in Canada. He will commence his studies there in September 2016. Werner Straeuli started studying as a mission student, but joint the list of FELSISA

students at the end of 2015. Student of theology Mathias Hohls has been transferred to the *Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church* (SELK) in Germany. Pastor Helmut Paul (Wittenberg) serves as the local student advisor.

The next (provisional) retirement dates of FELSISA pastors are: Winterle (2017), Straeuli (2021), Niebuhr (2021) and Reinstorf (2023). This means that the FELSISA may have a surplus of pastors from 2019, but we trust that God has plans for the FELSISA and each student of theology. Should however these plans include that FELSISA pastors serve within one of its partner churches, it is to be seen as FELSISA's contribution to mission and the extension of God's kingdom worldwide. The FELSISA has no legal obligation to employ students on completion of their studies.

The synodical council has considered that all prospective students of theology undergo a psychometric test. The test could also form part of the vicarage. A test costs approximately R3,000.

8. Statistics

Not counting the associated members, the 2014 statistics showed a slight increase of 0.11% (3 members), with an increase of 0.61% (16 members) in 2015. These statistics confirm very slow growth and highlights the need to reach out into our communities. No specific new trend became apparent in the past two years. It is still problematic that transfers in and out do not always balance. Special effort needs to be made that transferred members are well received in their new congregations. Resignations are sometimes the result of emigrations, and have been noted as such in the news statistic book.

9. Contacts with other Churches, locally and internationally

9.1 Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA)

During its Church Convention in December 2014 the LCSA elected a new bishop, Modise Maragelo (Krugersdorp). His installation took place on 1 March 2015 in Salem. The outgoing Bishop, Dr. Wilhelm Weber (jr) continues to serve as the LTS rector. A combined meeting of church councils, LCSA and FELSISA, was held on 19 October 2015. It is generally agreed that meetings between the two churches should take place more often, in particular an annual meeting of both church councils, a biannual meeting of pastors (a pastors conference) and also a joint (mission and/or song) festival (possibly every three years).

Bishop Reinstorf also visited Bishop Maragelo in Kagiso for informal talks, with Bishop Maragelo visiting Bishop Reinstorf in Pietermaritzburg with talks concerning the confessional Lutheran Church in Middelburg (see below 9.3). It is hoped that the established fellowship between the two churches will be practiced more often in future. Both churches are members of the LTS, the *Mission of Lutheran Churches* (MLC), and the *International Lutheran Council* (ILC).

9.2 Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Tshwane

A report by the chairman of the Board of Directors of the LTS will be presented at this convention. It is still the vision of the synodical council that in future FELSISA students will study theology at the LTS in Tshwane. BA students are encouraged to attend lectures at the LTS as often as possible.

The FELSISA is grateful for courses presented by the teaching staff of the LTS, one being hosted in Kichdorf by Prof. John Pless (Fort Wayne, USA) in 2015.

9.3 Confessional Lutheran Synod

The *Confessional Lutheran Synod* (CLS) is the newly registered name of the confessional Lutheran Church in Middelburg, under the leadership of Pastor Mandla Khumalo. It was founded through the support of individuals and in particular one district within the *Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* (LCMS). Pastor Khumalo was ordained by Bishop Tsweadi (LCSA), but Pastor Khumalo and his congregation chose to remain an independent entity. The church has grown tremendously over the past years with the addition of a number of congregations. The CLS has approached the LCMS to establish church fellowship. This resulted in a meeting of local confessional Lutheran Churches in South Africa in Pietermaritzburg on 16 May 2016, attended by Bishop Reinstorf (FELSISA), Bishop Maragelo (LCSA) and Pastor Khumalo (CLS) and some other delegates from the CLS. Amongst other a *Federation of Confessional Lutheran Churches* was discussed. The way forward is to be further discussed with the General Secretary of the LCMS, Dr. Albert Collver, who intends to visit South Africa soon.

9.3 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, Natal-Transvaal (ELCSA N-T)

Bishop Reinstorf attended the Church Synod of the ELCSA (N-T) from 15-18 October 2015 in Kroondal. The theme was *Diversity in Unity*, in particular the diversity between city and rural congregations. Amongst the many presentations, also a study document on homosexuality was presented. It should be noted that this document does not present the official stance of the ELCSA (N-T), but is a document to be studied and discussed by the congregations. Apart from dealing with the topic itself provides insight into the hermeneutics (interpretation theories) applied by the members of the commission. The ELCSA (N-T) is presently engaged in unity talks with the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa/Cape Church* (ELCSA/Cape). Unfortunately the *Lutheran Institute of Theology* in Pietermaritzburg has in essence been closed, with prospective students now studying at the faculty of theology of the *Stellenbosch University*.

On 11 April 2016 delegates from the church council of the ELCSA (N-T) met with the synodical council of the FELSISA in Pietermaritzburg. In a presentation on the Church of Christ, Bishop Müller highlighted the sentence: “Lutherans believe that the Church of Christ is bigger than any single denomination,” thereby expressing the willingness of the ELCSA (N-T) to engage with and to learn from other churches, who each have their own biblical focus that characterises them.

It was agreed that talks should be continued in particular on the topics of hermeneutics, the role and interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions, understanding and attendance of Holy Communion, and identifying areas of cooperation, including where there are vacancies or areas in South Africa where one of the two churches have no congregations. Although there has been an exchange of documents, no date has been set for the next round of talks. Based on the overloaded schedules of the church leaders, the synodical council is convinced that (smaller) working committees should be called that can meet more regularly.

9.4 International Lutheran Council (ILC) and Partner Churches

The 25th Conference of the ILC was from 24-27 September 2015 in Buenos Aires, Argentina on the topic *Bringing the Reformation to the World*. Bishop Reinstorf represented the FELSISA. In the past Bishop Reinstorf also attended the ILC World Seminaries Conferences. The synodical council has requested Dr. Karl Böhmer to represent the FELSISA at the next ILC World Seminaries Conference, to be held in Wittenberg, Germany, from 10-14 October 2016 on the topic *Shaping Confessional Lutheranism for the 21st Century: The Impact of the Lutheran Reformation on Mission, Worship, and Worldview*.

Opportunities also presented themselves to have talks with all bishops and presidents of the partner churches of the FELSISA. The FELSISA profits greatly through these engagements.

Very inspiring was the mission trip together with, among other, president Egon Kopereck from the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil* and Dr. Walter Winterle (Cape Town), to Mozambique at the beginning of August 2015 for the ordination of the first pastors of the newly established *Concordia Lutheran Church of Mozambique*.

9.5 Conferences and symposiums

On invitation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), Bishop Reinstorf attended the *Second International Conference on Confessional Leadership*, held from 3-8 May 2015. It was attended by 115 Lutheran leaders and coincided with the dedication of the Old Latin School in Wittenberg. This building is to serve as an outreach center for confessional Lutherans and is generally known as the Wittenberg project (see <http://thewittenbergproject.org>).

In 2016 Bishop Reinstorf also attended the *Conventus Reformatus*, a conference of South African churches that emanated from the Reformation. It was held in Cape Town from 8-10 March on the topic *The South Africa we pray for*. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet local church leaders and to engage in topics that affect our South African society and local communities.

10. Conclusion

The Synodical Council wishes to thank all members of the FELSISA who work tirelessly, mostly in an honoury position, to help the FELSISA in its many ministries and administrative duties. We pray for God's continued blessing and guidance as we seek to be a synod that is TRUSTING, WELCOMING and CARING.

Respectfully submitted by
Dieter Reinstorf
Bishop, FELSISA
Date: 26 July 2016