



Bishop's Post December 17 January 2018

As the "Reformation 500" celebrations draw to a close, I would like to share with you my personal journey in this regard.

It starts with my earliest memory of a Reformation celebration. My grade 4 class had learnt to recite Psalm 46 as a "speech choir", and we presented it in the St Peters Pretoria church. I only recently realised that had been the 450th Jubilee.

Since then Reformation festivals became more and more special for me. It was a privilege to visit Wittenberg and stand in Luther's study.

Then, in the last two years, things changed. I started researching the Waldensians, a reformation movement more than 300 years older than the Lutheran one. I discovered how this movement influenced John Wyclif in England and John Hus in Prague, how it led to the formation of the Bohemian (Moravian) churches. And then I stumbled across Hieronymus of Prague - a lay professor of that university. When John Hus was imprisoned and tried by the council in Constance, Hieronymus travelled to that city and posted theses on various church doors, protesting the wrongs of the church and pointing it in the right direction. This was 1415 - a hundred years before Luther!

Fleeing from Constance, Hieronymus was captured a few hundred kilometres away, brought back, tried and burnt on the stake a few months after Hus (who died on the stake on 6 July 1415)

The German theologians in Prague left the city and university in protest, not against the church, but against Hus and the movement that was growing even faster after the death of Hus and Hieronymus. The Germans shared the view that Hus, Wyclif, Valdes, Hieronymus and many others were extreme heretics who deserved every bit of the punishment that they received, and who belonged into hell for all eternity.

It is in this climate that Luther grew up and was educated. When, after posting his theses in 1517, he was compared to Hus and Wyclif, he protested vehemently. How dare they compare him to these heretics. Only later he realised that these were not heretics, and that their teachings were very, very similar to his. Proudly he then announced: I am a Hussite, a Waldensian, a teacher like Wyclif!

It is fairly common knowledge that Luther was against a church being named after him. All these years I thought it was because of decent Christian humility. Only now I realised that Luther knew that he was not the pioneer, the first one to bring reformation. Many, many before him taught the same, and paid with their

lives for this teaching. He was embarrassed, even disgusted, that people would choose his name for their church.

Well, it happened anyway, and we are “Lutheran Church”, and I assume that it will not be changed easily. But I hope that all our celebrations, research and reflecting on the reformation will help us at least to realise: Our identity does not lie in Martin Luther, but in Christ. We are Church of Jesus Christ, and our core task is and remains to proclaim Christ and to confess: **“No one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3,11)** During the time of Christmas we celebrate the small, almost insignificant laying of this foundation in the Child at Bethlehem.

Church history shows that this foundation gets easily overgrown by tradition and other things, making it invisible. The reformation jubilee reminds us that people are needed who cut away the weeds and overgrowth to reveal the foundation, people who proclaim: Church can only be built on Jesus Christ!

This is a never ending task. At all times and in all places we need people that remind the church of its foundation - people like Luther, Hus, Hieronymus and thousands more, whose names have long since been forgotten. Let us, like them, make sure that Jesus Christ is not forgotten

I wish you a blessed Christmas and a good start in 2018!

Yours in Christ



News from the Church:

1. After the Midrand and Kelvin Congregations elected **Pastor Jack Magoro** from ELCSA as their new pastor, he relocated from Limpopo to Midrand and started his service in ELCSA (N-T) on 1 November 2017. His induction is planned for 26 November 2017. We trust that he and the family will settle in well, and that the blessing of the Lord will be with them.

2. The re-location of **Pastor Dieter Trümpelmann** from East London is planned for the end of the year, so that he can commence his service as pastor of St Peters by the Lake in January 2018. We trust that the children will quickly adapt to their new schools, and that the family will experience God’s blessings.

3. The **eQuip** retreat is planned from 2 to 7 January 2018 in Hermannsburg, KZN. **“ALIVE!”** - this theme invites young and old to get ready for 2018. More information at <http://www.elcsant.org.za/equip-2018.html>

4. Two new office bearers have started their terms in Church Council. **Henning Springer** as president of synod, and **Vernon Filter** as treasurer of the church. We are grateful to **Wolfgang Fechter** and **Ronald Küsel** for their years of service in these offices, and trust that the newcomers will experience their service as a blessing to themselves, their families and the church.

5. The word of greeting from Synod gives an overview of what was discussed, and who was elected. You can find it on our church web page.