



BISHOP'S
April 15 **POST** May 15



“God is good” “all the time” - “All the time” “God is good” - this is how a speaker greets the congregation, and the congregation responds - not once, but a few times. I am attending a service in Addis Ababa. The congregation is 11 months old. It started off as a prayer group from the “mother congregation”. This is how things are done in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).

Church President Rev Dr Wakseyoum Idossa explains the process. “Of course congregations know that they do not exist for their own benefit. Their task is to spread the gospel, establish new congregations” It sounds as if he states the most obvious fact about Church.

When a congregation wants to reach out into the neighbourhood further away from the Church, members living there start with a prayer group. As it grows, they identify and rent a suitable house, with enough space to later build a hall or church. As a next step the house is bought, and as it becomes too small, funds are raised for a larger building. Once a congregation is strong enough to be self sustaining, pay the pastor’s salary and contribute towards the running costs of the EECMY, it can apply to become an independent member congregation. Only then does the Church become involved. Up to then it is under the care and supervision of the mother congregation.

With this attitude and approach the EECMY has grown to 8000 congregations, but only has 3000 pastors - the Church is growing too fast! Therefore the Church assists in the training of Evangelists and Lay preachers, who might later do a two year course to be ordained. In January in one region 40 Pastors were ordained! But that is by far not enough!

This visit makes me think. What struck me most was the statement: “Of course the congregations know that they do not exist for themselves, but to spread the gospel” I am reminded of the Ethiopian official from Acts 8. After he became a Christian, “he went on his way rejoicing” we read in verse 39. Can it be an “Ethiopian thing” - this joy? Or is it the power of the gospel? I reflect on how, in our Church, we are often too shy to say anything, and all too seldom radiate the joy of being a Christian. Perhaps Mark 16.8 describes many of us better: “and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

I wish that we can learn from our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia, learn to spread the gospel with joy, as if it is the most natural thing to do.

Christ has conquered death and sin, he has brought us life! This is reason for joy! “God is good - all the time!”

(More information on the visit to Addis Ababa can be found at www.elcsant.org.za)

News from the Church

1. Pastor **Anja Spiske** was elected by the Port Elisabeth Congregation as successor to Pastor Felix Meylahn. With her move to Port Elisabeth in November Piet Retief will become vacant.
2. Pastor **Georg Meyer** has requested leave of absence to be part of a study process in Germany for at least a year. With this, the Durban Parish becomes vacant after Easter.

Talks between ELCSA (NT) and Cape Church

The main aim of any Church structure should be to enable congregations to better fulfill their calling at grass roots level.

1. The task team agreed that merger between Cape and NT is possible and can work.
2. There are no significant legal impediments to a merger.
3. The bishops shall start trying out aspects of co-operation.
4. Finances
 - a. Both Churches are currently covering their costs
 - b. Current investigations suggest that a merger will neither immediately become significantly cheaper nor significantly more expensive
 - c. The approach to raising income is different between the Churches and will need further discussions
 - i. Collections in ELCSA (NT) result in additional ministries. The Cape Church does not have compulsory collections. Most collections are used for the congregation's annual budget requirements.
 - ii. The approach to solidarity is very different in the Cape from the NT. In the NT it is given on a voluntary basis and raises a significant amount. In the Cape it is part of the congregation's levy and only plays a small part.
 - iii. In NT some costs are borne by congregations, which in the Cape are funded centrally (such as travel to pastor's conventions, synods and circuit events). Thus the direct cost impact on the congregations is different.

The task team currently finds no apparent reason that merger should not be aimed at for 2017. Synods in 2015 would have to deliberate and decide on this. This implies that all relevant information needs to be ready for the 2015 Synods, so that informed discussions and possible decisions can be taken.

The congregations are requested to pray for this process.

Horst Müller