

Overview: Congregation Empangweni / Moorleigh

The Moorleigh Congregation can be found about 20km outside of Estcourt on the way to the Drakensberg. It has been an important place in the history and development of the church as we know it today. To date the congregation has 64 baptized members. Services are held every Sunday in German, except for the 1st Sunday of the month where a combined service is held with the Winterton congregation (alternating between the congregations) in English. The service times are: January-July at 10:30 and August to December at 08:30. The present pastor is Pastor Elke Carrihill, who serves both the congregations Moorleigh / Empangweni and Winterton. She was inducted into her duty of the congregations in January 2010. The Postal Address: P O Box 231, Winterton 3340.

Historical Overview

In 1863 the Missionstation Empanweni was founded by Missionaries Heinrich Ludwig Kayser and Colonist Licht. It was from the founding of this Missionstation that the congregation of Empangweni was established. In 1898 it was this Mission station that became the centre for the Hermannsburg Mission in South Africa. In years that follow many missionaries joined the station. Together with German farmers in the area it was decided in June 1907 to found a German congregation in the area. Missionary von Fintel was asked to serve the congregation besides his duties in the mission field. In 1908 it was decided to build a small church for the newly established congregation. Up until then the congregation met in the buildings of the Mission Station. Already in October of that year (1908) the 'St Johanneskirche' was consecrated. However it did not take long when the decision was taken to build a bigger central church for both the mission and the congregation. In 1911 the foundation stone was laid for the 'Gnadenkirche' and negotiations were made with the mission to also erect a church for the Zulu speaking congregation. On the 13 December 1913 this new church (Gnadenkirche) was consecrated and the congregation had a new building / home. Having established its 'new home' the congregation also had its own graveyard established next to the church. It is in this church that services are held to this day for the small congregation.

In 1903 the need arose for the children of missionaries to be educated. Other families in the area shared this need and this led to the beginning of the little school in Moorleigh. In the first years of its establishment the school was in the hands of the mission, however in 1918 it was taken over by the German congregation. By 1953 a new school building had been erected and later, in 1958, a boarding establishment was added to the school in order to cater for children from further away. Sadly today, with the developments of the area and the decrease in the number of children, the school and boarding establishment no longer exists.

The congregation was always one of livelihood and activity, and being right next to the Mission Station there was always a buzz of life there. The 'Mission Press' was established in 1906 and it was here where many books were printed in Zulu, Tswana and German for the use of spreading the gospel in South Africa. Already in its early beginning a choir and a brass band choir was brought to life and many were blessed in this work.

There were missionaries and pastors who served the congregation of Empangweni. There were times when these were shared with the Winterton congregation and times when they were separated. In the years of establishment it was Missionary W von Fintel who took on the spiritual responsibility of the congregation. He served the congregation, next to the mission, from 1907-1912. Missionary Wiese took over the work in 1912 -1920 until he took over the responsibility for the whole Mission in South Africa. His work in the congregation was taken over by Pastor W Bodenstein in 1920. He was elected Praeses in 1922 and served the church and the congregation until his death in 1946. Pastor Hahne was sent to Empangweni and was then also elected Praeses and like his predecessor served both church and congregation till 1966. In 1966 Pastor Hagedorn took over the spiritual leadership of both congregations, Winterton and Empangweni and due to health reasons he had to go on early pension in 1974. After a short time of vacancy Pastor Kraus came to Moorleigh in 1975 and stayed till 1978. Pastor Scriba then took over the responsibilities of the congregation until 1980. Beginning of May 1980 Pastor Reymann served the congregations Moorleigh / Winterton till July 1981. In 1982 Pastor Dieter Harms came to Moorleigh and lived and served the congregation till 1989. Gilbert Filter then took over the Spiritual Leadership, first as Intern and then as Pastor from 1989-1997. In

1999 the congregation again had a Pastor from Germany, Pastor Dieter Klee, who stayed with the congregation from 1999-2006. In December 2006 Pastor Wolfgang Schilling took over until his return to Germany in June 2009. In January 2010 Pastor Elke Carrihill came to serve the congregations Moorleigh and Winterton.

Changes and Challenges

Being a very small congregation the challenges faced by the community are manifold. Language has been a challenge for many years, finding the right balance between the German heritage and the contemporary English influx. The Moorleigh congregation has chosen to stick to its German heritage and in this way has managed to uphold many age old traditions and serve a congregation that is deeply rooted in these and find their Spiritual growth in it. Keeping a congregation going with such small numbers is another challenge however there is strong commitment and willingness to serve our Lord through the congregation. We continue to trust that our Lord has blessed and will blessed this congregation in this place on the way to one of the world heritage sights: The Majestic Drakensberg.

Compiled, Elke Carrihill
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