

Report of the Leader of the Church Choir Association of the ELCSA(N-T) 14.5.2011

At the end of my first four-year term of office, I would like to thank my loyal committee members for their support and input. Special thanks go to Maria Hillermann, who once again typed the entire song book for the choir festival and also formatted the programme for the worship service and organised the printing. I would also like to thank all the choir leaders and singers for their continuous hard work. Without them there would be no Choir Association and no Choir Festival. They are the foundation of our work.

The theme of the Choir Festival in Hermannsburg on 15.5.2011 was God's creation. The watchword was: *Lord, You have made so many things! How wisely You made them all! The earth is filled with Your creatures.* (Psalm 104,24). This was followed by the question: *How do we humans treat this creation?* The festival was a resounding success and it was well attended. 560 people had indicated their intended participation. Among these were ± 200 singers (excluding the 50 school choir members, who joined us in three of the songs). Since our bishop, Horst Müller, had been required to attend a conference in Port Elizabeth and only returned in the last minute after driving through the night, he could not hold the sermon, as originally planned. Pastor Burgert Brand then took over this duty and prepared a series of very moving short addresses with his pupils. These made a deep impression on everyone present. However, I would still like to ask the Church Council to give such important festivals as the biennial choir festival preference when planning inter-synod conferences and similar events, so that the bishop can participate actively in our festival. It is always held on the Sunday Jubilate, alternately with the brass band festival. Please make a point of keeping this weekend free of other commitments!

We invited Rolf and Christel Rohwer as guests of honour, since they had lived many years in Hermannsburg, working for the school and the Choir Association. They each conducted two choir pieces. We also involved the Hermannsburg School Choir and its conductor, Gerard du Toit. Two of the regional leaders also conducted some of the pieces. So we had sufficient variety and I found it a great relief that the responsibility did not rest entirely on my shoulders. I would like to thank the Hermannsburg Congregation with all my heart for their hard work in preparing this festival. Particularly the spacious stand was generally acclaimed by the singers!

Last year (2010) the customary regional choir festivals again took place. Though I was unable to accept the invitation to the festival hosted by the Friedenskirche (Northern Region) on 8th August, I did attend the festivals in Dundee (Eastern Region) on 12th September and in Pietermaritzburg (Southern Region) on 1st August. These events have shown once again that, despite all difficulties, there are still many people who enjoy singing in a choir. In October I was privileged to accept an invitation to the annual Choir Festival of FELSISA in Greytown. I am very happy to see that there is ever increasing cooperation between our two churches, both in the Choir Association and the Brass Band Association. Our last main choir festival, too, was very well attended by members of FELSISA.

Until 14.5.2011 the committee consisted of myself, our spiritual counsellor, Maria Hillermann, the leader of the Eastern Region, Gerald Kohlmeyer, who is also my vice leader, the vice leader of the Eastern Region, Christel Küsel, the leader of the Northern Region, Thea Thiele, the vice leader of the Northern Region, Walter Johannes, the leader of the Southern Region, Wolfgang Kassier (unfortunately a vice leader could not be found for this region) and our secretary, Walli Düvel. Only one change was effected at the last meeting of representatives (14.5.2011): Maria Hillermann was not prepared to stand for a second term of office as spiritual counsellor. So Udo Lütge was elected in her place. We thank him for his willingness to serve on our committee and are looking forward to good cooperation, especially with regard to the youth work. Our heartfelt

thanks go to Maria for her service of many years and we hope that she will still support us with her ample experience. We also thank our bishop, Horst Müller, and the leader of the Brass Band Association, Siggi Prigge, for attending our committee meetings whenever possible. We always appreciate their valuable input.

The committee met in Hermannsburg on 13.5.2011 and also in Pietermaritzburg on 13.6.2009 and in Vryheid on 8.5.2010. After the choir festival we met on 18.6.2011 in Vryheid to plan the programme for the next choir festival in Piet Retief on the Sunday Jubilate in 2013.

The choir booklet for 2011 was made available at the end of November 2009, so the choirs could start rehearsing the prescribed pieces bright and early. I think that everybody enjoyed the music because the songs were sung joyfully to the praise of God at the festival. I hope that we shall be able to produce the next choir book as punctually.

Although Rona Hagedorn is still willing to lead choir conductors' workshops, various factors have prevented her from doing so during the past two years. Two workshops were planned for the Northern Region, but both had to be cancelled as a result of either a lack of interest or other previous commitments on the part of potential participants. Many choir leaders did, however, participate in the annual Schütz Week held in Hermannsburg in July 2010. The young German church musician, Markus Uhl, inspired us all with his youthful enthusiasm and humour and we learned a great deal. I can only encourage everybody to attend future Schütz Weeks. This year it was held in Paarl, which made participation by singers from our region a little more difficult.

The library of the Choir Association has found a new home in Hermannsburg. Maria Hillermann sent out an inventory of the available music several years ago, but we have as yet had very little response. Anyone interested in more information or wishing to borrow some of the music, should apply to me.

We are still trying, with limited success, to involve our youth in our choir work. As in the past, we organised a youth camp with youthful activities at the last choir festival. We thank Udo Lütge for his efforts in this regard. The participation of the youth in choirs at events such as the main choir festival and annual youth camps has been very pleasing over the last few years. However, youth involvement in local church choirs has been fraught with difficulties. We cannot deny that traditional four-part singing seems to have become a dying art in many parts of our church. At the same time, it is seeing an encouraging revival in other parts. I must emphasise here, that it is not necessarily the difference in musical tastes that keeps young people away from our choirs, especially in the cities, but rather an overabundance of academic, sports and other activities, offered by schools, universities and other institutions. Many young people participate in school and regional choirs, which proves that an interest in four-part singing does still exist, even though it remains a challenge for us to utilise it for our church choirs. I firmly believe that people will always sing, though perhaps not in the same way as our older generation has done.

I can but pray that we shall continue to praise our God joyfully with our voices, in unison or in parts, with or without accompaniment, as long as we just do it! Each congregation should adapt to its own circumstances and fully utilise the talents and means at its disposal.

Marianne Kassier