

CCE (Circuit Conference East) Report Synod 2021

Introduction

Since our last Synod in 2019 in East London, all of our lives and the life of the congregations have been impacted in one way or another through the Covid-19 epidemic. We have lost congregation & family members, friends and even Pastors Oziel due to the Covid-19 epidemic.

We are all on a journey in our life and Paul reminds us in Romans 10:15 “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” The covid-pandemic has drained all of us and tired us out. Deep down we just feel empty, alone and we wonder where we will get the strength to keep on going? But we have not been alone in these tiring and exhausting times. The wonderful assurance we have, is that the Living Jesus Christ is present in all aspects of our life. May we experience how Jesus tends to our tired feet, and that God strengthens our feet!

1. Congregational overview:

Jesus serves us through gathering us together in his congregations. Since we last met there have been the following changes within God’s congregations:

Inland Parish (St Pauls Stutterheim, St Johns King Williams Town, St Pauls Macleantown). The parish has become vacant from the 1 July 2020. We want to thank Pastor Martha Weich for her service within these congregations and the CCE. Bishop Filter is serving these congregations as locum tenens.

St Crucis. I am pleased to report that Pastor Frank Schütte has been elected as St Crucis’ new pastor. Pastor Schütte officially started on the 1st of December 2020 and was inducted on the 7th March 2021.

Lutheran-Church Bloemfontein. I am pleased to report that the congregation pastor post has been filled. Dr Gideon van der Watt was inducted as pastor on 7.3.2021 by Pastor em Nils Rohwer. We would like to thank Pastor em Nils Rohwer for serving the congregation as locum tenens.

Friedenskirche Port Elizabeth. Pastor Anja Spiske currently serves this congregation.

Coastal Parish (St Andrews, Luther Brakfontein and St Peters Komga). This parish is served by Pastor HP von Fintel.

May we within these CCE congregations open ourselves up - to being more as God’s children embracing and engaging with the seemingly friendly looking stranger because behind every stranger is the face of God.

2. What has the Covid – 19 Pandemic highlighted - positives

Looking back over the last year we need to acknowledge that the Covid pandemic reminded us that the church did not close, but that we, as members of God's congregation, are church there where God has placed us. This became tangible in the following ways:

- Some members shared the devotions, or daily bible verse or the Sunday service with friends and family: be it forwarding it on social media or printing out a copy and putting it in some one's post box who did not have access to it otherwise.
- Some members phoned the lonely and listen to what they had on their heart.
- Some members did grocery shopping for those who could not leave their homes because they were in quarantine or could not go themselves because of their high risk.

Seeing the care taking place within God's congregations reminded me that "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

3. What has the Covid – 19 Pandemic highlighted - negatives

Many of the things that we took for granted – we are struggling with now:

Church Attendance: When the lockdown did not allow for "in church/ in person" services – the request was – when will we be able to gather in our churches again -- and now that we are back in our church buildings - in some instances our members have not returned – is it easier to watch the service "on line".

Children's Ministry: Children's ministry starts at home as the parents have promised before God at the baptism of their children to teach them about God. Thank you for all the efforts that were made during these difficult times to reach God's little people through bible stories as well. We need to encourage our young families to return to church.

Youth ministry: Youth work remains difficult. May we all prayerfully ask God to direct us as we all have the responsibility to care for the youth God has entrusted to us.

Church music: Music still remains a concern for many congregations and pastors. We desperately need to encourage people to use their gifts, may it be piano, guitar or any other instrument without continuously comparing and judging.

Outreach:

We as congregations are called to follow in Christ's footsteps to use our feet to share God's love there where God has placed us in His communities and this brings me to St Luke's Mission Station. At the last Synod at St Andrews, we decided as God's church to help the St Luke's community. We were able to secure some funding from the LWF and with these monies and generous clothing & household item donations we have been able to assist this community. The pandemic has highlighted the country's inability to support and care for the poorest of the poor, education, medical

care and feeding schemes came to halt and have not been fully re-instated. So the moral and despair is huge, so may we use these challenging times to be church with and for the people. People are desperate for someone they can trust, as they are mostly lonely and afraid.

In Conclusion

Let us build trust relationships by being a person of trust for someone else and build trust with them by being trustworthy. Let us provide safe spaces where people can be open about their struggles and faith.

May we remember to use our feet to share God's Good news.

Greetings

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'H' followed by the name 'Hans-Peter von Fintel' written in a cursive script.

Pastor Hans-Peter von Fintel
Chairperson of the CCE
28/09/2021