

## **Report on the Theological Education of UELCSA July 2023**

Dear Members of Synod, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I thank you for allowing me to present a summary report of my work as Tutor and Director of Studies for the Theological Education of UELCSA.

When I started out more than 6 years ago, I was appointed in a part time position (25%) as tutor for UELCSA theology students at the faculty of theology of Stellenbosch. In the meantime, many organisational matters have been finalised. Now UELCSA is an official partner of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University and we have become valued participants on various levels of the work being done at the faculty both with the students and with the staff. And I have been appointed full time in the post of Tutor and Director of Studies for the Theological Education of UELCSA (this includes both the students and the interns of our three churches).

In this report I want to give you an overview of what my work with our candidates for the ministry entails and what I, being appointed full time, hope to do more effectively as I grow into this task. I report on my work from a down to earth perspective, describing plainly what I do with the students and interns.

**1. Regular conversations** with the students and interns about the content of their various courses and their experiences in ministry.

Studying theology, which includes inter alia critical historical exegesis using the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) and systematic and practical theology, can bring about agonising afflictions (Anfechtungen) about one's "childhood faith". Even as an intern in a congregation, things that one has learnt and understood work out in ways that one does not expect and this too can bring about crises of faith and agonising doubts about one's calling into the ministry.

This "task" or "calling to conversation", as I would rather name it, is to me the most important as well as the most difficult one to quantify or test for its effectivity. I have made a point of scheduling meetings with the individual students for in depth conversations about whatever they have on their minds as well as reports on the work they have been doing in the various subjects they are busy with. As you can probably appreciate these conversations roam far and wide – and I try, wherever possible to guide them back carefully to the subject of "How does all this stuff that you are studying affect and change your faith as well as your perception of what you will be doing as a pastor?" When it becomes clear to the students that there is not a specific "right" or "wrong" answer to this question and that they are indeed free to share what studying theology is "doing to them", the conversations become fruitful and help both conversation-partners to learn and grow towards an integration of spirituality and academic theology.

**2. Seminars** about aspects of theology and ministry that are specific to the Lutheran faith community.

In this area of work, I have been developing and offering several courses: An introduction to Lutheran Theology based on the Catechisms of Martin Luther, an overview of the other Confessions of the Lutheran Tradition as well as an introduction to "Law and Gospel Hermeneutics" to encourage a faithful as well as critical approach towards Bible study and

teaching. In the beginning, on account of the small number of students, we have held these courses as a group, even though the students were at different points in their academic development. This has made for very interesting learning opportunities, as the "older" students had to "learn" how to speak plainly about the "complicated" things they already know, so that the "younger" ones can follow the conversations. We have had to change this now, and have an Undergraduate Seminar and a Postgraduate Seminar meeting regularly every week. My purpose here is to develop more specific and in-depth conversations at the level of theological training the students have achieved.

I have also encouraged the students to participate in the church services in Stellenbosch and in their home congregations, to actively engage in the student fellowship of the Stellenbosch Congregation and then to reflect critically on their experiences as they practice the various "roles" they will have to fill as pastors one day. I will return to this aspect under point 5, because I believe that a more intense involvement in this practical work is needed from our congregations and pastors as well. The English evening services in Stellenbosch, in which mainly students participate, have become the preferred setting for our theology students to "practice" what they have learned to do in homiletics and the other fields of practical theology.

### **3. Exercises in Spiritual Formation and discernment** for leadership in the Lutheran Church.

The Spiritual formation of pastors is at the core of the program called "Seminarium", which was originally developed by the NGK and the URCSA and then, when we "Lutherans" were welcomed into the process, I was asked to make specifically Lutheran contributions to these courses. I have participated in this intense program (there are "Seminarium Meetings" called "Iziko" with the students in their year groups every week during the terms) as a co-facilitator for various year groups as well as giving more substantial input from the Lutheran Tradition in the meetings of the third-year group e.g., a Course on the Augsburg Confession and another one on the Barmen Declaration. Furthermore, I have participated in the meetings of the committee that revised the full Seminarium Program after its first 8 years of implementation. It was restructured completely and is now in the process of implementation. I believe it is crucial that we continue to participate in this process as fully as possible and am really grateful that I can now devote my time fully to these tasks. I have subsequently been asked to chair the meetings of the executive committee of the Seminarium (Seminarium Bestuur).

I also have become involved in the worship committee (Coram Deo) of the faculty, together with some of our students, so that "our worship tradition" (as it is called at the faculty) can become part of the spectrum of traditions celebrated in the various events held in and by the faculty (semester opening services, regular Wednesday services in the Chapel and some public events for the high festivals of the church year).

4. At the beginning of this year I was asked to be the chair of the **Ecumenical Board** of the Faculty. The faculty has about 7 partners (various denominations/churches) that have over the years decided to have their candidates for the ministry trained in Stellenbosch. The board consists of representatives from these partner churches and through it we have direct access to the various processes that happen at the faculty e.g., appointments of lecturers and conversations about and the development of the curricula in the various departments of the faculty.

**5. Practical engagement** in Lutheran and other congregations in order to introduce the candidates to the social and cultural contexts in which they will be working as pastors.

As I mentioned above, I want to invite involvement in this aspect of the work with the students from our congregations and pastors. We need to find suitable congregations and pastors that have a heart and an aptitude for this ministry to become "sponsor congregations" in the original meaning of the word sponsors ("Paten" in German). This is not only about financial and prayer support for the candidates but more intentionally becoming involved in the actual practical growth of people preparing for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in our Congregations. The congregation in Stellenbosch is very willing to offer as many opportunities as possible for the students to practice the various tasks of the pastor, but now that we have more students, I think it would be helpful if the students could get to know the variety that exists among the other congregations and pastors of our churches.

I think it would be good for the churches of UELCSA to identify congregations and pastors who would be able and willing to assist in this part of the training, and I am convinced that this should not be left to the time of internship (Vikariat). Because of the distances involved, some congregations will be more suitable for holiday practicals, but some of the congregations in the Western Cape have already started to help with this task and make opportunities for ministry experiences possible even during the semesters. The students are of course also expected to be involved in their home congregations during the longer holidays and have been quite diligent in this.

I want to thank all the congregations and pastors who have been supporting our students and allowing them to participate in various events, services and ministries. This is very valuable in gaining both experience and confidence and I hope it also contributes to the expanding horizons of your congregations.

At the end of their academic training as theologians (once they have completed their Master of Divinity degree) our students enrol for the First Theological Examination, in which the Examination Board of UELCSA establishes whether they have learnt enough and are mature enough to be appointed as interns in our congregations, moving on to the second phase of their training for the ministry. The preparation for this exam takes place during their 5 academic years in Stellenbosch under my tutelage and I must say that I thoroughly enjoy doing this work, which in many ways reminds me of my time as a student under the strict but gracious guidance of the tutor we had in Pietermaritzburg (Pfarrer Herbert Kraus).

## **6. Internships**

As director of studies for the UELCSA I am also co-responsible for the interns (Vikariat) of our churches, as they do their internships in the various congregations especially also for their preparations for the Second Theological Examination. This is the time for them to practice what they have studied, to learn from the pastors in their host congregations and to also become more aware of the highly complex situations our various and sometimes very different congregations are in. It can be quite overwhelming and therefore it is imperative that the pastors under whose guidance they are working have time and the heart to really guide and support them in this new phase of their journey. Interns are not there to alleviate the work load of the pastors – they need extra work from their pastors. I say this a little bluntly because misperceptions have been circulating.

One more important note in closing. I want to encourage all congregations to include our theology students and interns in their prayers regularly – studying theology is a challenge, both academically and spiritually – they need your prayers. So I mention them by name:

They are: Ingrid von Sittert (Intern in Namibia)

Hermann Düvel – (Intern in Cape Town)

Anika Sanders – (Intern in Piet Retief)

Hans-Christoph Lange – (M.Th)

Tristan Krüger – (M.Div)

PJ Hanekom (M.Div)

Rutendo Gora – (B.Div IV)

Bernhard Schiele – (B.Div III)

Chundre Phillipus (B.Div I)

Greetings in Christ,

Felix Meylahn