

CREDO 2025

***A BOOKLET OF FAITH:
WE BELIEVE, TEACH AND PRACTISE ...***

***1700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF NICAEA 325***

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Howick - South Africa

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CREDO 2025 - A Booklet of Faith Contents:

Introduction

The Three Creeds

The Small Catechism by Martin Luther

A Short Overview of Lutheran Theology (Georg Scriba)

Ecumenical Basis Catechism (EBC)

The Augsburg Confession (mainly the first 21 Articles)

Guidelines for Church Life in NELCSA 2019

CONTENTS

1. Baptism
2. Worship Service
3. Holy Communion
4. Confession
5. Youth Ministry in the Congregation
6. Church Wedding and Christian Marriage
7. Death and Burial
8. Membership of Church and Congregation
9. Mission, Offices and Structure of Congregation and Church
10. Church in the World
11. The Evangelical Lutheran Church and Other Churches

The Books of the Bible

Contents of the Bible

Words from the Bible

The Church Year

The Lutheran Hymnal and Liturgical Colours

Order of Church Service and Occasional Services

A Short Review of Church History

Periods in the History of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in SA

Seven Theses of Comfort and Compassion

II. THE NICENE CREED

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made: who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man: who for us, too, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered death, and was buried: the third day he rose according to the Scriptures, ascended into heaven, and is seated on the right hand of the Father: he shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son: who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified: who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy, Christian, and apostolic church.

I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.

*In 1948 the ecumenical **World Council of Churches (WCC)** is founded in Amsterdam, by combining the two ecumenical movements of "Faith and Order" and "Life and Work". The Sixth Council on **Faith and Order** to be held 24-28.10.2025 at Wadi El Natrun, near Alexandria, Egypt, to mark the 1700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.*



The Nicaea Council 325

A SHORT REVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY

In general we divide Church History into four parts: The Early Church, The Middle Ages, The Reformation and The Modern Age, and this Chronology follows this set-up.

However the History of Christianity is often divided into six "Paradigms" (historical era), according to Hans Küng and David Bosch (who combines each era with a characteristic mission text):

1. *The apocalyptic Paradigm of Early Christianity.*
2. *The hellenistic Paradigm of the Patristic Epoch (John 3:16).*
3. *The Roman-Catholic Paradigm of the Middle Ages (Luke 14:23).*
4. *The Protestant (Reformation) Paradigm (Romans 1:16f).*
5. *The modern Paradigm of Enlightenment:*
 - 5.1. *The Christian West (Acts 16:9);*
 - 5.2. *The Premillennialist: Adventists, "Holiness"-Movement, Pentecostals, Fundamentalists, Evangelicals etc (Matthew 24:14);*
 - 5.3. *The "Social Gospel"-Movement (John 10:10);*
 - 5.4. *The Protestant Mission Movement (Matthew 28:18-20);*
6. *The evolving post-modern Ecumenical Paradigm (1. Peter 2:9)]*

Periods in the History of Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa

1. The Early Church in Africa: Christianity comes to Africa - AD 30-650

Simon of Cyrene the cross-carrier of Jesus with his sons Alexander and Rufus might possibly be the first African Christians (Mark 15:21) and the eunuch, finance minister of Ethiopian queen Candace, one of the first baptized Africans (Acts 8:26-38). Acts tells of Christians from Cyrene and Apollos of Alexandria (Acts 18:24-28). 1.2. According to tradition the evangelist John Mark established the church in Alexandria, Egypt, by converting the cobbler Anianus and founding the Coptic church there. Soon there were 5 churches in Egypt and Libya.

The Catechetical School of Alexandria was the first theological college of its kind. In 180 Clement, the principal of the school, systematically used Greek wisdom philosophy to discern Christian teachings. His successor was Origen. (died 254),.4. By 300 the Christian church in the Roman North African provinces grew with more than 250 bishops. With the fall of the Roman empire under the Germanic tribes (430) and the spread of Islam (650 onwards), the church in northern Africa

was dispersed, with the exception of small Coptic churches in lower Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia.

It was only in the late Middle Ages that Portuguese traders touched Southern Africa: 1488 Bartholomew Diaz lands on southern Cape coast and Vasco Da Gama gives a Christian name to eastern coastal area, Tierra da Natal in 1497. But no real Christian penetration into the interior takes place.



1488 Arrival of Bartholomew Diaz/ 1497 of Vasco da Gama



1652 Arrival of Dutch East India Company under Jan van Riebeeck

2. Early start of Lutheran mission work in South Africa: (1650-1800)

1652 Jan van Riebeeck comes to the Cape, under the auspices of the Dutch East India Company who adhered to the Reformed Confession. Some mission work was done among the Dutch settlers, slaves and contacts with the San and Khoi khoi. Of the latter, Eva was the first to be baptised and then to be married to a Dutch man, van Meerhof.

1665 Lutheran immigrants are allowed to participate in the service of the Dutch Reformed services.

1688 Arrival of French Huguenots and founding of two French Reformed congregations.

1774 German Lutherans, counting about half of Cape Town's male population, build their church from a store-house in Strand Street. Although from German background they use a Dutch hymnal. Only in 1778 was religious freedom granted. In 1780 the Strand Street Church calls their first "Leraar", minister, Andreas Lutgerus Kolver, born 1743 in Zwol neer Rotterdam.



Lutheran Church, Cape Town



ANDREAS LUTGERUS KOLVER,
Minister der Nederd. Hervormde Kerk te Kaapstad.
Hij is geboren te Zwolle, den 17den Junij 1743.

1737-44 Mission work starts with Georg Schmidt, a Moravian missionary who worked at Baviaanskloof (renamed Genadendal) amongst the Khoi-Khoi. Moravians were a nondenominational community, established in Germany in 1722 by Graf von Zinzendorf with the Lutheran Augsburg Confession as their confessional basis. They proclaimed the Gospel in combination with an ethic of hard work, and therefore founded self-supporting and close-knit communities. After receiving his ordination by letter and having baptised some six of his helpers the Reformed ministers at the Cape and in Holland prohibited Schmidt to continue his work and he left in 1744. About 50 years later in 1792 the Moravians, Schwinn, Kühnel and Marsveld, returned and found Schmidt's pear tree blooming and met Vehettge Magdalena Tikhuie, an old woman who still had Schmidt's New Testament and had been a witness to the gospel message.



6 Lena, an early convert, meets returning Moravians



7 George Schmidt,
Moravian missionary

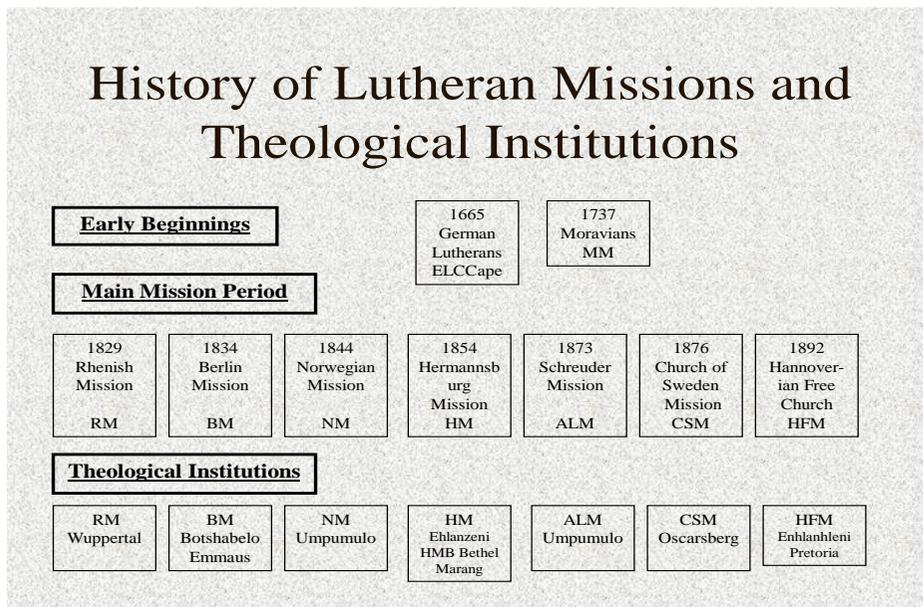


8 Genadendal Moravian Mission Church

3. The main Lutheran missionary engagement: (1800 - 1900)

1795 British occupation of the Cape (1795) and founding of the London Missionary Society. The LMS would soon be known for such famous missionaries as John Th. Vanderkemp in Bethelsdorp, John Philip as LMS superintendent in Philipstown, Robert and Mary Moffat in Kuruman and David Livingstone on his journeys through southern and eastern Africa. Anglicans started their work among garrison soldiers in Cape Town and then among 1820 British settlers in the Eastern Cape. The Methodist spread north- and eastwards, Barnabas Shaw worked among the Nama and William Shaw established a chain of stations in Kafraria. The Scottish mission founded Lovedale near Alice, and the French Mission started in Basutoland. Missionary Owen of the American Board working in Zululand, witnessed the massacre of Retief by the Zulu king Dingaan.

Nama, Damara, Herero and Rehoboth in present-day Namibia, where they also founded some German congregations. Together with the Finnish Mission Society the RMS was so influential there that Lutherans today are the largest denominational group in Namibia.

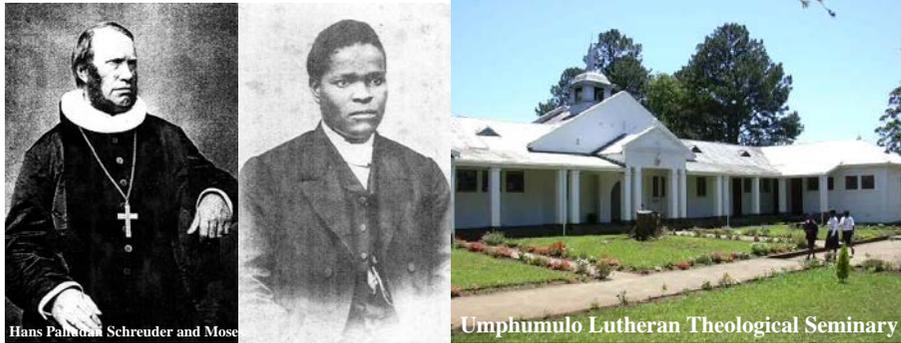


1829 In 1799 twelve pious laymen in Elberfeld, Germany, formed a missionary prayer group which joined similar groups to form **the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS)**, embracing members of Reformed, United and Lutheran churches. In 1829 the RMS started to work in the Cape Colony at Wuppertal, Stellenbosch, and Tulbagh. In 1840, the RMS's went to the North among the

1834 **The Berlin Mission Society (BMS)** was founded in 1824 by a number of prominent Berliners. Its work spread widely throughout southern Africa, starting among the Korana in the Orange River Sovereignty (at Bethany) in 1834, moving from there to the Tswana in the Cape Colony (1837), the Xhosa in British Kaffraria (1837), the Zulu in Natal (1847), then to Transvaal (1860), Mashonaland/ Zimbabwe (1892-1906) and Swaziland (1930). The largest BMS field was the South African Republic (Transvaal) with stations among the Southern Sotho, Pedi, and Venda, e.g. Botshabelo, "City of Refuge". They also worked among German speaking immigrants and dependants;



1844 The **Norwegian Mission Society (NMS)** began in 1842 as a revival influenced by the farmer/ merchant Hans Nielsen Hauge (who emphasized Bible study, prayer, conversion, and repentance), by the Danish pastor-poet N.F.S. Grundtvig (emphasizing the pastoral office and divine worship) and by the Moravians in Norway. In 1844 Hans Palludan Smith Schreuder arrived in Port Natal and founded the mission station Uphumulo in 1850. After healing king Mpande's rheumatism, he was granted land at Empangeni in the Zulu kingdom. Schreuder, appointed as bishop in 1866, came into conflict with NMS over his powers as bishop, and resigned in 1873. The NMS spread its work in Natal and Zululand.



1854 The **Hermannsburg Mission Society (HMS)** was founded in 1849 by pastor L.Harms (1808-1865) in Hermannsburg, Germany, on strict Lutheran confessional principles. The HMS founded its first mission station, Hermannsburg, in Natal in 1854, and from there daughter stations spread throughout Natal, and later into the Zulu kingdom. At Ehlanzeni the first indigenous seminary for evangelists was established in 1870. In 1857 the HMS took over Liteyane, started by D Livingstone, and used it as a base for mission work among the Tswana. It also worked among German speaking settlers.



1870 The **Finnish Mission Society (FMS)** was founded in 1859 in Helsinki as a consequence of the 700th anniversary of Christianity coming to Finland in 1157. In 1870 the first missionaries began their work among the Ovambo in northern South West Africa (Namibia). Martin Rautanen (1845-1926) translated the Bible into Ndonga.

1873 After the split in the Norwegian Mission Society, Schreuder aligned himself with **Church of Norway Mission - Schreuder Mission**, and started mission work at Untunjambili in Natal, spreading to Zululand. In 1928 the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (ALM) took over the management of the Mission and also founded missions in the goldfields of the Orange Free State. The Americans contributed managerial and administrative skills to the Lutheran missions.

1876 The "high-church" **Church of Sweden Mission (CSM)** was founded in 1874, with the Archbishop as its president. The first Swedish missionaries, O.Witt and C.L.Flygare, arrived in South Africa in 1876 and established the first mission station, Oscarsberg, at Rorke's Drift. The first indigenous worker of the CSM, Joseph Zulu, was ordained in 1901. The CSM extended its work to Johannesburg and Southern Rhodesia;

1892 A split in the Hermannsburg Mission Society lead to the establishment of the **Hannovarian Free-Church Mission (HFM)**, which worked among Zulu-, Tswana and German-speaking people (Freikirche).

4. Growth, Consolidation and Independence: (1900 - 1960)

4.1. The Boer War (1899-02) led in 1910 to the formation of Union of South Africa. Two World Wars in 1914-18 and 1939-45 caused a surge for independence in the colonies of Africa, e.g. Uhuru in Ghana in 1957.

4.2. Lutheran missions stressed the importance of African languages, Bible translation and developing vernacular forms of worship. Berlin missionaries pioneered translations in Northern Sotho, Pedi and Venda, while Hermannsburg missionaries revised Robert Moffat's 1857 translation into Tswana. The Berlin missionary J.Döhne helped the missionaries of the American Board in the first translation of the Zulu New Testament in 1867. The HMS published a Zulu Bible translation in 1922 at Moorleigh.

4.3. The administration of a mission lay in the hands of the home mission agency in Europe. Offerings were collected from donor congregations to acquire necessary tools and materials for the development of the overseas missions stations, for Christian literature, for buying mission land and for salaries of missionaries, evangelists, pastors and for their pensions. In the beginning the mission director would visit the "overseas mission field" for inspection. The missions soon appointed a superintendent to supervise the overseas mission work. Often the Constitution of the home church was introduced also on the "mission field". Missionaries met for conferences to discuss common matters and later to elect their office bearers. Once congregations were properly established they relied on the output of mission stations, their own contribution and support from the mission work locally. Administrative powers had to be transferred to the field during the war years. For the election of a local leadership and adoption of a constitution a supporting body, the synod, comprising also representatives from congregations, became necessary.

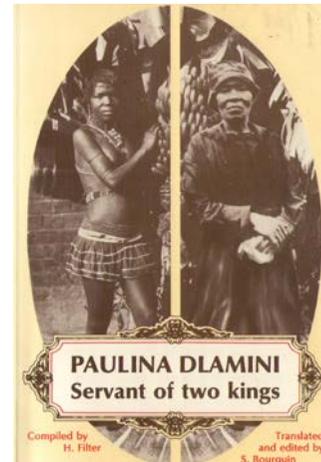
4.4. Important was the training of indigenous helpers, evangelists and later pastors. Each Lutheran mission had its training centre, e.g. the BMS in Emmaus and Botshabelo, NMS in Umphumulo, CSM in Oscarsberg, HMS in Ehlanzeni and Bethel. This led to an African leadership within the developing independent Lutheran churches.

Indigenous Individuals influenced Lutheran missions/ churches in a special way:

1860s **David Mokgatle Modibane**, having been converted around 1839 by Methodists at Thaba Nchu, preached in cooperation with missionary groups, including the HMS. He founded several congregations, including the large HMS station at Bethany, near Pretoria.

1877 the first Zulu Christian martyr, **Maqhamusela Khanyile** (b. +-1807) was executed on 9.3.1877 near the Norwegian Mission, Kwa Mondli. On 5.3.1877, **Joseph**, who asked Rev Fröhling for baptism, was executed at a distant but neighbouring Hermannsburg mission station, Enyenzane.

1887 **Paulina Nomguqo Dlamini** (about 1858 -1942), known as the "Apostle of Northern Zululand" served the Zulu king, Cetshwayo, in her teenage years but later, while working on a white farm, she was visited twice in dreams by a figure in white robes who told her to teach his people, the old and the young. Working with various missionaries, and other African evangelists, she founded a number of congregations in Zululand.



1890 **Timotheus Sello and Martinus Sewushane** were the first two Africans to be ordained as pastors by the Berlin Mission Society in 1885. Sewushane, as pastor at Lobethal, was angered by what he regarded as the paternalism, authoritarianism, and excessive strictness of the missionaries and joined the missionary Johannes Winter, who in 1890 broke with the Berlin mission, founding the Bapedi-Lutheran Church with the support of the Pedi chief Cholokwe.

4.5. The Lutheran missions were divided among themselves, not only by nationality, but by their form of church governance, by their liturgical traditions, by the varying degrees of emphasis they placed on the Lutheran confessions, and

by the extent of their willingness to cooperate with non-Lutherans. Most Lutheran mission societies emphasized the importance of language and culture as the incarnation of the Word of God in this world (in German, *Volkskirchen*). As a result a patchwork of distinct Lutheran churches spread through Southern Africa. They then devoted great energy in overcoming these divisions by grouping disparate congregations and missions, first into synods, then into regional and ethnic churches.

1889-1964 **General Lutheran Conference in Natal (1889-1964)** was initiated, in which all six Lutheran missions in Natal participate. This would, together with the work of CLM, become the initiator for the establishment of the South Eastern Regional Church 1960-1963.

1895 Constitution of the German-speaking **South African Synod, Cape Church** under the auspices of the Hanoverian church in Germany.

[1904 General Missionary Conference of Southern Africa founded]

[1910 First World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh greatly influenced mission theology.]

1912 **Co-operating Lutheran Missions (CLM)** was founded by the five Lutheran Missions in Natal/ Zululand (BMS, NMS, SCM in 1912, ALM in 1927, HMS 1938). It co-ordinated the training of teachers, evangelists and pastors (in Umpumulo, Oscarsberg and Emmaus), the printing of Bibles and Hymn Books and mission work in general;

1911 The **German Evang.-Luth Synod (Hermannsburg)** was constituted by 11 German speaking congregations in Harburg.

1911 The **Berlin regional synods: Cape, Transvaal and Natal** regions were formed with greater powers of independence from the mission's home board.

1925 The **German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of congregations in co-operation with Berlin Mission Society;**

1927 Three German speaking synods (in SWA, Cape and Transvaal) establish an **German Evangelical Lutheran Church Alliance (DELK Bund);**

1936 Christian Council of South Africa, renamed in 1968 as the South African Council of Churches (SACC):

1953 In the **Council of Churches on Lutheran Foundation in S.A. (CCLF)** closer co-operation between Lutheran churches is envisaged and this leads to the formation of FELCSA.



1957-1966 Mission churches become independent

(ELC = Evangelical-Lutheran Church; ELCSA = Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Southern Africa; SWA = South West Africa; N = Namibia);

1957 Rhenish Mission Church in SWA (ELCSWA - Rhenish Mission); now ELCRIN = Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia;

1959 ELC in Southern Rhodesia; now ELCZ = Ev.Luth.Church in Zimbabwe;

1959 ELCSA Tswana Regional Church (ELCSA-Tswana), since 1975 ELCSA-Western Diocese (ELCSA-WD)

1960 ELCSA SE Region (ELCSA-SER), 1975 ELCSA-South Eastern Diocese (ELCSA-SED);

1960 DELKSWA - German Evangelical-Lutheran Church in SWA; now ELCIN(DELK);

1960 ELCSWA Ovambocavango; now ELCIN;

1960 Moravian Church Western Cape;

1961 ELCSA Transvaal Region (ELCSA-Tvl), 1975 ELCSA-Northern Diocese (ELCSA-ND)

1961 ELCSA (Transvaal Church), since 1981 amalgamated with ELCSA(Hermannsburg) to form ELCSA (Natal-Transvaal)= ELCSA(NT), since 2022 NELCSA;

1961 ELCSA (Cape Church);

1963 ELCSA Cape Orange Region (ELCSA-COR), since 1975 ELCSA-Cape Orange Diocese (ELCSA-COD)

1963 ELCSA (Hermannsburg), since 1981 amalgamated with ELCSA (Transvaal Church) to form ELCSA (Natal-Transvaal) = ELCSA(NT);

1966 Moravian Church in Eastern Cape

*1967 Lutheran Church in South Africa [Free Church] (LCSA);

*1972 Free Evangelical-Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA);



KwaMondi ELCSA-SER Synod 1960/ 1962

5. Federal Groupings, Mergers, Unity (1960 to today)

A new constitution of the Republic of South Africa is adopted in 1961. In 1994 this changes towards a democratic government.

Lutheran churches search for closer co-operation and unity in federations and nation-wide churches. During the 20th Century in South Africa, most black Lutherans were united in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA), founded in 1975, and most white Lutherans are associated with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) founded in 1965. These churches, along with the Moravians and Lutherans from other southern African countries, co-operated in the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA), established in 1966 which was reconstituted in 1991 as the Lutheran Communion of Southern Africa (LUCSA)

1964/5 United Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (VELKSA) comprising the four German-speaking Churches (Cape, DELKSWA, Transvaal and Hermannsburg), see DELKBund; responsible for liturgical questions and training of pastors;

1966 Marks the establishment of the Federation of Evang.-Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA) comprising some 750 000 members from the thirteen participating Lutheran and Moravian churches in Southern Africa, mentioned above as independent churches, with the exception of the two Free churches*.

1965-78 Influenced by the LWF theological researcher Hans Florin, the

Missiological Institute at the LTS Umphumulo becomes a centre of theological research and discussion. Delegates from South African churches and theological training institutions grapple with matters concerning the churches' socio-political responsibility in an Apartheid society and questions on the Africanisation of the Gospel. The conferences had the following themes (with year of publication): *Our Approach to the Independent Church Movement (1965)*, *Missionary Outreach in an Urban Society (1966)*, *The Healing Ministry of the Church (1967)*, *The Lutheran Teaching on the Two Kingdoms Doctrine (1968)*, *Concepts of Death and Funeral Rites (1969)*, *Migrant labour and Church Involvement (1970)*, *The Role of the Church in socio-economic Development (1971)*, *A relevant Theology for Africa (1972)*, *Salvation Today for South Africa (1973)*, *Church and Nationalism (1974)*, *Affluence, Poverty and the Word of God (1977)*, *Ideologies of Change (Capitalism, Socialism and Marxism) and the power of the Gospel (1978)*.

1968-90 Churches in South Africa address the Apartheid policy of the country: The SACC and Christian Institute publish *The Message to the People of South Africa (1968)*; the General Synod of the NG Kerk legitimates government policy with *Human Relations in the Light of the Scriptures (1974)*; the NG Sendingkerk stresses the unity of the church against Apartheid in the *Belhar Confession (1982)*; the National Initiative for Reconciliation is initiated (1985); a group on Contextual Theology publishes the *Kairos Document (1985)* and *Road to Damascus (1988)*, the General Synod of NG Kerk rejects the theological justification of Apartheid in *Kerk en Samelewing (1986)*; a national Conference of church leaders rejects Apartheid in the *Rustenburg Declaration (1990)*.

1969 FELCSA church leaders conference decides on fellowship at altar and pulpit between all member churches in FELCSA, introduced 1971. In 1975 the *Swakopmund Appeal* is accepted by FELCSA church leaders. They speak out against alien principles in the churches' life (apartheid).

1975 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) is constituted by merging the four Regional Churches. Originally with 5 Dioceses it is today subdivided into 7 Dioceses, with a membership of some 600 000.

1980 The ELCSA Assembly and UELCSA General Synod, independently from each other, support the decision of Lutheran churches in the LWF to admit women as theology students and accept them in ordination. Since then the

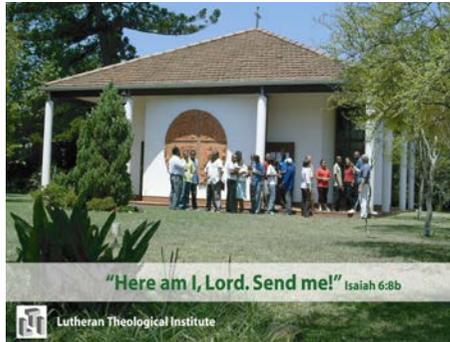
percentage of women pastors, deans and even as bishop has risen.

1981 The ELCSA (N-T) is constituted when the two “German speaking” churches, ELCSA (Hermannsburg) and ELCSA (Transvaal) merge (a membership of appr. 10 000).

1985-95 A Unity Committee, established between the three churches, ELCSA, ELCSA (Cape) and ELCSA (N-T) attempts, as yet unsuccessfully, to unite these Lutheran churches.



1983-95 Unity Committee ELCSA, ELCSA(N-T)
ELCSA (Cape)



1991 The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) is formed as successor of FELCSA with 14 member churches: the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches in Mozambique, in Angola, in Malawi, in Zimbabwe, in Botswana; the Ev.-Luth. Churches in Namibia: ELCIN, ELCRIN (Rhenish Church) and ELCIN(DELK); and those in South Africa: ELCSA with 7 Dioceses, ELCSA(N-T), ELCSA(Cape) and the Moravian Church. The total membership of LUCSA is about 1 610 000.

1994 General elections introduce a new democratic South Africa under the leadership of the first black president, Nelson Mandela. Before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee crimes of the past are revealed. However churches lose some of their prophetic and public witness which was so important during the Apartheid years.

2003 The Umphumulo Lutheran Theological Seminary merged with the Lutheran House of Studies in Pietermaritzburg to constitute the Lutheran Theological Institute, training Lutheran ministers at the School of Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The LTI was closed at the end of 2016.

2010-14 Under the auspices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany a study process on the developments of the German Evangelical Churches in

the colonial and apartheid period of Southern Africa was published.

2017 500 Years of Reformation: World-wide, Lutheran Churches in collaboration with other churches held 500 Years Anniversary celebrations. A “Luther-Decade” preceded this Anniversary: 2008 Opening of the Luther Decade; 2009 Reformation and Confession; 2010 Reformation and Education; 2011 Reformation and Freedom; 2012 Reformation and Music; 2013 Reformation and Tolerance; 2014 Reformation and Politics; 2015 Reformation - Visual Arts and the Bible; 2016 Reformation and the One World. The 500th Anniversary of the LWF in Windhoek/Namibia (May 2017) had as theme: ‘Liberated by God’s Grace’, with three sub-themes: ‘Creation – Not for Sale’; ‘Salvation – Not for Sale’; ‘Human Beings – Not for Sale.’

2020-2022 During the COVID -19 epidemic, when a country- and world-wide lockdown was implemented (March 2020), Churches and congregation turned to zoom and internet meetings and services.

2023 “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope”, theme of the 13th Assembly of LWF in Krakow, Poland, 13-19 September 2023. In 2024 LWF had 151 member churches in 99 countries with 78 million adherents.

2023 Statistics of Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa: (to nearest 100)

Namibia 1,277,700: ELCIN- GELC 4,200; ELCRN 420,000; ELCIN 853,500:

South Africa 682,900: ELCSA 580,000: ELCSA Cape Church) 4,000; NELCSA 9,300; Moravian Church 80,000 and non-LWF members FELSISA 2,600; LCSA 7,000.

Official State Census of 2001: of 44.8 million South Africans, 1,131,000 (2.5%) referred to themselves as Lutheran. Of these only 58% were registered in SA Lutheran churches. Of mid-2024 statistics of SA are 63 million, 1% are Lutherans.

6. Living Under the Cross

6.1. The Lutheran church has its specific place and contribution to make in the Southern African ecumenical scenario of Christianity. With D.Bosch, *Transforming Mission - Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York 1991, p 512-518, we might state that God has given the confessional branches of His Church different emphases on the gifts of grace:

- *Anglicans* emphasize the incarnation and humanness of Jesus Christ (Christmas);
- *Roman Catholics* emphasize Christ's suffering (Lent);

- Lutherans the cross as symbol of Christ's death and resurrection; (Lent and Easter);
- Orthodox members emphasize Christ's resurrection (Easter);
- Reformed Christians emphasize the reigning Lord (Ascension);
- Apostolic Churches stress the ministry of the Apostles (Mission /Sending);
- Pentecostals and Charismatics stress the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost);
- and Seven Day Adventists the second coming of Christ (Parousia; Eternity Sunday)

6.2. Each denomination can contribute in the ecumenical context with its own theology and Christian practice. Lutherans are to witness the theology of the Cross, to Christ who participates in the suffering of us humans. The theology of the Cross sees Christ's suffering and death as God's way of salvation, even if God's ways are concealed to us.

6.3. The distinctive features of Lutheranism brought from Europe to South at first made it an appealing choice for Africans. But in the twentieth century it was slow in dealing with modern challenges (e.g. theologies of political protest) and in bridging to African culture that other churches offered. Lutheranism has put down deep roots in South African culture while at the same time retaining its role as preserver of several immigrant cultures. The core message of Lutheran theology remains: that God's love for a fallen world, given by grace, is received solely by faith in Jesus Christ. As in the past, Christians in the 21st Century also look and wait in hope to him "who is, who was and who is to come" (Revelation 1:8).

Seven Theses of Comfort and Compassion

In our search for spiritual comfort in all hurts, tensions and rifts, the Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross and his Seven I-am-Words may guide us:

1. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing**", and adds, "**I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me**", then he is searching for the lost and wants us to invite back the lost, by forgiving each other.
2. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.**" and adds, "**I am the gate, whoever enters by me will be saved**", then no one is so guilty and unacceptable, that the door to true life will be closed.
3. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**Woman, here is your son,**" and

"**Here is your mother**" and adds, "**I am the vine; you are the branches**", then he wants those hurt and distanced to find each other and live in unity under his cross.

4. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" and adds, "**I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life**", then even those far from God are not abandoned but are included in his call and in his promise of light and life.

5. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**I am thirsty.**", and adds, "**I am the bread of life**", "**I am the water of life**", then he gives himself in our physical and spiritual hunger and thirst, in daily bread, water and wine and at Communion in his body and blood.

6. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**It is accomplished**" and adds, "**I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me**", then he accomplishes our imperfection, that we can walk the way of truth to true life and fatherly love with him.

7. If our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, says: "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit**" and adds, "**I am the resurrection and the life; those who believe in me will live, even though they die**", then we may place our life, our fear of dying and death into our Father's loving hands, from whom nothing and nobody can separate us.

