



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
SOUTH EASTERN DIOCESE
DURBAN CIRCUIT

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DURBAN CENTRAL PARISH

Guidelines for Lay preachers

of the Durban Central Parish (ELCSA-SED, Durban Circuit)

1. Introduction

The Durban Central Parish Council during its meeting on 4th June 2015 instructed the clergy of the Parish to discuss and then present a written proposal of guidelines for lay preachers of the Durban Central Parish to the Parish council. The background to this instruction lies in the need to have specific criteria to assist Pastors and Congregational councils in providing guidance in this important part of Congregational life: preaching God's Word.

This text is not a lay preachers training manual. Neither does it provide a theological checklist to screen sermons by lay preachers. Rather it should help to differentiate, what is stated in the constitution, what is clarified by these guidelines, which decisions have to be made by theologians (i.e. Pastors-in-charge) and which issues can be decided upon by Congregational councils. It is important to clarify, who decides what, so that the proper procedures are followed. Furthermore it strives to provide guidance on the process of nurturing, identifying, training and overseeing lay preachers in the Parish.

The constitution of ELCSA is a living document, which is developed and amended as the Church grows. The latest amendments were effected 2011. In its current form ELCSA Constitution does not regulate the office of the lay preacher in any way. This void lead to the necessity of formulating these guidelines for use in Durban Central Parish. ELCSA Constitution does however state the foundational Lutheran Texts of the Church (the book of Concord), which includes the unaltered Augsburg Confession (CA) – see Constitution Part I § 2.1. The CA does pronounce on the place of the sermon in the Lutheran Church.

2. Preaching of the word – one of the basic criteria of being a Church

a. Signs of a Lutheran Church

In the Confessio Augustana – one of the foundational documents of ELCSA (see Constitution....) – the two basic criteria of being a Lutheran Church are stated in CA VII: “The Church is the Congregation of Saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.” This places the ministry of preaching at the core of the identity of a Lutheran Church and as such it deserves serious attention. All other rites and forms of liturgy are secondary of nature. In CA VII it reads: “And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.”

This means, that ELCSA must direct its energy more on the content of the sermons preached from its pulpits, than on the form of the liturgy used in its services, which is always secondary in nature to the content of the sermons.

For this reason the Church requires its principle ministers of the word – the Pastors – to undergo theological training, in order to preach the word in the right and responsible way. As Pastors can not be on every pulpit of the Church every Church service and as the Lutheran teaching of the priesthood of all believers sees the value of each christian’s gifts in the life of the Church, the Church sees the possibility of lay preachers preaching the word of God. Just as there are laws regarding the training, selection and overseeing the work of Pastors, there is a need for clarity in the field of lay preaching.

b. Lutheran understanding of Scripture

While God inspires all humans and while there are a multitude of ways of expressing ones faith, there is a specific Lutheran way of reading the bible, of preparing a sermon and of preaching in the Lutheran Church. The LUCSA “Living Together in Christ” Book 6 (An Adult Christian Education Resource for Lay and Clergy, 2015) in Unit 6 (pg35-37) gives an overview of Lutheran preaching and sermon preparation. All lay preachers are expected to be taught on the basics of Lutheran teachings on faith, on the Lutheran teachings of understanding scripture and thus on the Lutheran way of preaching. This includes the teaching of the role of law and of the Gospel in the life of a Christian and thus in the sermon. A sermon is never merely a lesson on morals. A sermon which does not contain the gospel, is not a sermon.

c. Truth and Heresy

The Pastor in charge of each Congregation is responsible for what is being preached from the pulpit of that Congregation. Thus the training and overseeing of lay preachers ultimately lies in the responsibility of the Pastor in charge of each Congregation. Even though there are very unique and different ways of preaching, there is also a wrong way of preaching and there is also a wrong content, against which the Pastor and those assisting him must guard. This is also the reason, why no person may preach in a Lutheran Church without consent of the Pastor-in-charge!

3. Process of becoming a lay preacher

a. Grooming of our children of youth in giving their faith a voice

It is the duty of each Christian to play a part in preparing a fertile ground for nurturing lay preachers. It is the duty of parents, to encourage conversations on faith and reading of the bible in their homes, it is the duty of a Congregations Christian education ministry (Sunday school, confirmation class, bible study groups, home cell groups, leagues) to teach and to provide platforms for the young and others to always progress more learn to express their faith – not only in deeds, but also in words

b. Feeling called to preach?

i. The difference between witnessing and preaching

With the help of the Pastor in charge and lay preachers workshops, the Congregation at large will learn about the difference between witnessing (ukufakaza) and preaching. A calling to share one’s faith through words need not be a call to preach. And the gift of being able to give good speeches need not be a call to preach. The diligent reading of the bible, the willingness to meditate and ponder on the meaning of the word of God, the willingness to learn more about the times during which the specific text was written down, the willingness to enter into a conversation of the burning issues of our times and how this text speaks to us in the light of Jesus’ redemptive death and resurrection and delivers the Good News into the heart of each human kind.

ii. The need to use prayer and reason

Preaching a sermon is not just an act on standing in front of a Congregation, reading a bible verse and then starting to talk, hoping for divine inspiration. Preaching is hard work, which starts at home, involves prayer (inviting the holy spirit) and using reason (using our God-given intellect, logic and thinking capabilities). In the Lutheran Church both the Holy Spirit as well as God-given human intelligence is valued and vital for sermon preparation.

iii. The tools of the trade

The act of preaching includes

- the use of several different faculties: the voice, intonation, volume, body language, facial expression
- the proper „reading of the audience“ and adapting language, use of colloquialism, illustrations, length of sermon, etc. so that the listeners will hear and understand
- the omission of everything that distracts from the message (distracting content, distracting method of delivery, distracting appearance – incl. clothing)

c. The role of council

The Congregational council will interact with Congregational members, including Congregational league leadership, to identify potential lay preachers, bringing them to the attention of the Pastor in charge, who will be in conversation with the person in question. In the end the council – incl. the Pastor, will decide on the a lay preacher candidate, who will be admitted into the formal training process, at the successful completion of which he will be admitted to be a lay preacher.

d. The process of becoming a lay preacher

i. Identification

Any Congregation member may identify himself or someone else as a potential lay preacher candidate to the Pastor in charge, who will have a conversation with the person concerned and will inform the Congregation of the result of his conversation. The Congregation will in consultation with the Pastor in charge come to a recommendation.

ii. Lay preachers training course

The lay preacher candidates will attend at least six lay preacher workshop sessions before being admitted to hold a trial sermon.

iii. Assessment of sermon

The assessment of a sermon is not an exam, but a chance to receive some feedback on a sermon held in a service in a conversation with the Pastor and council members. After the discussion of the sermon of the lay preacher candidate the Pastor will give a recommendation to the Congregational council, which will then, if there is no necessity of further training, note the completion of the identification and training process.

iv. Induction service

The Pastor will induct the lay preacher into his/her service in a festive induction service in the presence of the Congregation.

e. Reviewing lay preachers status

The Congregational council together with the Pastor will review all the lay preachers active in its Congregation every three years (in the year after ELCSA-wide elections and three years later). Part of the review is to make sure, that the lay preachers have attended the minimum number of required attended session of lay preachers workshops (two per year) as continuing education.

4. Code of Conduct for lay preachers

a. Preparation

Lay preachers are required to prepare their sermons. If it is evident, that the lay preacher did not diligently prepare, an intervention is required.

b. Punctuality

Lay preachers are required to not only be punctual regarding the starting time of the service they preach in, but also to be mindful of the length of their sermon, which should range between 15 and 30 minutes. Proper preparation will guard against lengthy sermons, which often include wandering off the topic.

c. Profanity

Any use of swear words/ profanity from the pulpit is strictly forbidden. Even though colloquial language may and should be used, where it helps to clearly put forward the Good News.

d. Personal content and addressing certain members or groups/ leagues

The use of names of Congregational members or of groups/ leagues active in the Congregation in illustrations in sermons should happen with great care and only, if this serves to further clarify the main points of the sermon and only if this mention does not cause embarrassment to the persons concerned. In no way is the pulpit to be abused as a platform to criticise any single person or group/ league in the Congregation. The platform for such a criticism, if it is at all necessary and only, if the criticism is constructive, is firstly the personal conversation with the person or group/ league concerned and secondly, if no resolution is found, a conversation with the Pastor in charge and/ or the Congregational council.

e. Dress code

Lay preachers, just as liturgists, are requested to use white albes when preaching.

5. Addressing allegations of misconduct

Lay preachers, just as all leaders in Congregations (such as Congregational council members, Congregational league leaders and the Pastor), have a special responsibility, which goes with their service as preachers. They have to evaluate their own sermons and strive to constantly improve their service. Congregation members are first and foremost listeners of the word and their mind should not be focused on evaluating and criticising the sermon, but to listen to what God wants to say to them. If, however, the conduct of the lay preachers clearly distracts from the message they are conveying – the gospel they are supposed to preach – then the following route must be taken:

- i) a personal conversation of the Congregation member making the observation of alleged misconduct with the lay preacher him-/herself with the aim of conveying the observation to him/ her, so that he/ she can rectify this.
- ii) a personal conversation with the Pastor in charge, so that he/ she can take the issue further with the lay preacher concerned
- iii) notifying a member of the Congregational council, so that the issue can be taken further by council

It is imperative to use the steps in the order specified. The first address – if things can not be clarified in a direct personal conversation with the lay preacher concerned – is always the Pastor in charge and only thereafter, if no relief is found, the Congregational council. Even in the latter case, the Congregational Pastor in charge must be involved, as he/ she is theologically trained and his/ her guidance is vital for a resolution in the process. The Congregational council's duty is not to evaluate or censor the sermons of lay preachers.

6. The preaching plan

The preaching plan is the central document that regulates, that the Word of God is preached each Sunday from the pulpit of each Congregation. It must not only be displayed on every Congregations notice board, but each council member and each lay preacher must have his/ her personal copy. The following should be taken care of:

a. Notifications

It depends on each Congregation, whether the lay preacher of the following week will be contacted to remind him/ her of their duty. This is the task of the Congregational secretary. Some Congregations only remind guest preachers from outside and take it, that their own lay preachers are aware of their duty.

b. Changes

Every lay preacher is responsible, that on the date his/ her name features on the preaching plan the gospel is preached in that Congregation. If one is not available on the allocated date, a replacement must be found as soon as possible, at the latest 10 days before the date. The change is to be noted on the plan displayed on the Congregations notice board. In case of emergency the Congregational chairperson/ helper-in-charge must be notified and another lay preacher who features on the preaching plan may be asked to assist.

c. Guest preachers

Only lay preachers accredited by the Congregational councils with the recommendation of the Pastor-in-charge may preach in the Congregations. Should a guest preacher be invited, this can only happen with the consent of the Pastor-in-charge. This point can not be stressed enough! The Pastor-in-charge has the responsibility, that the Lutheran Church remains a Lutheran Church (see CA VII and § 2 of these guidelines!) and that no heresies are preached from the pulpits of Lutheran Churches. The one who is best equipped to guide on this matter is the Pastor-in-charge and thus his decision is final. The Congregation should also diligently follow its policy on offering a sign of appreciation to any guest preacher – which is any preacher, who is not a member of the Congregation concerned.

d. Leagues

Leagues feature on the preaching plan. Guidelines on the aim of including leagues on the plan as well as on the process of preparation of their holding the Sunday service have been

passed by Parish Council and are available on the Parish website ([http://www.elcsadurban.co.za/Home/Resources - Guidelines.html](http://www.elcsadurban.co.za/Home/Resources_-_Guidelines.html)).

e. Joint services/ Parish or Circuit Activities

Generally, all Congregation members of all Congregations in Durban Central Parish are expected to attend Parish Events (Parish Confirmation Rally, Parish Easter Rally, Parish Rally, Circuit Rally). However, if Congregational council together with the Pastor-in-charge after careful consideration come to realisation, that only a minimum of members can attend these Parish or circuit activities, and that a service should take place in the Congregation for those, that can not attend, then permission may be granted for such a service.

7. Conclusion

These guidelines are there to enhance and not to stifle the proper preaching of God's Word in all Congregations of Durban Central Parish. God has provided all Church members with different gifts and these gifts – as stated in the letters of Paul (e.g. Ephesians 4:12) – are to be used responsibly and in a way to build up the faith of all. In this spirit these guidelines serve to assist the lay preachers themselves as well as all Church members and the leadership (Congregational councils and Pastors-in-charge) to work together that God's Word is spread in Durban and beyond.

May God bless all involved in preaching the Good News in Durban Central Parish!

Presented to the Durban Central Parish Council at its meeting on 5th November 2015 by Rev. Dr. Joe Lüdemann in consultation with all clergy serving in the Parish.

Rev. Dr. Joe Lüdemann.