

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF ELCSA**

### **THE MISSION PERIOD**

The history of ELCSA goes back to the involvement of Lutheran (or partly Lutheran) mission societies, particularly from Germany, since the late eighteenth century. These were: Moravian (1737-1774 and again from 1793), Rhenish (from 1829), Berlin (from 1834), Norwegian (from 1844), Hermannsburg (from 1854), American (from 1872), Swedish (from 1876), and Hanoverian Free Church (from 1892). These different societies managed, by and large, to live and work in peace alongside one another through mutual agreement about the regions and places of their missionary engagement.

Early attempts at co-operation were made in Natal, particularly in 1889 and 1912, where six different mission agencies were in operation. The next important step was the formation of the Council of Churches on Lutheran Foundation (CCLF) in 1953, which encompassed most Lutheran synods in the whole of South Africa (including the Cape Synod).

### **CONSTITUTION OF REGIONAL CHURCHES**

Towards the end of the fifties, and especially following the impetus of a meeting in Christianenburg, Natal, in 1958, the mission societies worked towards the formation of properly constituted regional Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa. The following were established: Tswana Region in 1959 (Hermannsburg Mission), Transvaal Region in 1961 (Berlin Mission), Cape-Orange Region in 1963 (Berlin Mission) and, a complicated one, the South-Eastern Region in 1963 (Berlin, Norwegian, American, Swedish and Hermannsburg Missions).

The Rhenish Mission did not follow this route; since the late 1930s it had handed over its congregations, except Wupperthal, to the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. The Moravians, in accordance with the world wide structure of their *Unitas Fratrum*, founded two separate “provinces”, in the Western and in the Eastern Cape. These united into one Moravian Church in South Africa in 1999.