Celebrating 50 Years of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Golden Jubilee: Music, Liturgy, and Buildings

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Abstract

This article grew out of the interest of the ELCSA celebrating its 50th Golden Jubilee anniversary with the theme: "United in Confession and Witnessing," held from 18 to 21 December 2025. Liturgy, music, and buildings are part of the collective rich history and heritage of ELCSA. Liturgy and music are the backbone of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, herein referred to as ELCSA. This study discusses a historical overview of the origins of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, a brief history of the arrival and contribution of Lutheran mission societies in South Africa since 1737, the formation of synods since 1911 and regional churches in the 1950s and 1960s towards the establishment of ELCSA in the 1970s within liturgy, music, and buildings studies. The study discovered that liturgy, music, and buildings were developed from the Western Evangelical Lutheran Church traditions. The article contributes towards the recommendations for Africanisation and decolonisation of liturgy to appeal to an African context. The historical review and conceptual analysis or theological interpretation methodology is used to analyse the collected data.

Keywords: church building theology; ELCSA unity and merger; healing ministry; Lutheran Spirituality; Lutheran World Federation (LWF); women

UNISA
Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
Volume 52 | Number 2 | 2026 | #20410 | 20 pages
https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/20410
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)
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Introduction

ELCSA liturgy, music, and the church building emerge from Lutheran teachings. Thus, the act of worship in the ELCSA church or any other under it happens within the context of *sola scriptura*. Lutherans in their liturgy and music within the corridors of ELCSA confess their Christian faith through the words of the three historical creeds: the Apostles Creed as primarily is the baptismal creed, the Nicene Creed emphasises the equality of the persons of the Trinity, namely God the Mother and Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Athanasian Creed is the confession of the teachings of the Trinity and the person and works of Jesus Christ. This study discusses a historical overview of the origins of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, a brief history of the arrival and contribution of Lutheran mission societies in South Africa since 1737, the formation of synods since 1911 and regional churches in the 1950s and 1960s towards the establishment of ELCSA in the 1970s within liturgy, music, and buildings studies. The study discovered that liturgy, music, and buildings were developed from the Western Evangelical Lutheran Church traditions. The article contributes towards the recommendations for Africanisation and decolonisation of liturgy to appeal to an African context. This article examines (i) the conceptualisation of Lutheran Spirituality, liturgy and music and the art of the church building captured by missionaries, synods, regional churches, and beyond and (ii) Africanising Lutheran liturgy.

Conceptualisation of the Lutheran Spirituality

ELCSA liturgy and music originate from the Lutheran Spirituality as the spirituality of the cross. For Lutherans, the understanding "for spiritually means to them nothing other than the spirit of Christ that is present, or the power of the absence body of Christ and his merit" (Kolb and Wengert 2000, 504). According to Senn (1993, 62), liturgy and music were very instrumental in fulfilling the mission of God to His people. Thus, they were "two powerful means for empowering for mission." Lutheran Spirituality is primarily centred around faith, particularly on the cross of Jesus Christ, which is the realm in which God is hidden and revealed. The term for Lutheran Spirituality is actually "Evangelical Spirituality," where the term "evangelical" means the Gospel, the good news (Veith 2010, 18). Evangelical focuses on the Gospel of Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection as a means for the forgiveness of sins and offers salvation as a gift from God. The term "evangelical" means Lutheran. Those who followed Martin Luther, the reformer, were evangelicals. "Lutherans were the first to be *called* evangelical. They were also the first to emphasise the Gospel to such an extent that it became central to *every* facet of their doctrine and practice" (Veith 2010, 17–19). Lutheran churches first explain themselves as Evangelical churches, which literally means Gospel churches. The use of the name "Lutheran" did not mean Lutherans are disciples of Martin Luther but the disciples of Jesus Christ. "They proudly accepted the name of *Lutheran* because they agreed" with the teachings of Luther (Engelbrecht 2010, xiii). Lutheran Spirituality appeals to scripture as the gospel of the message of sin and

grace in spiritual matters and a theological concern with a reference to the medieval church (Althaus 1970,8).

Lutheran Spirituality traces its originality from Luther's theology of reformation on his key teachings of *solas*. *sola scriptura*, scripture alone; *sola gratia*, grace alone; *sola fide*, faith alone and *solus Christus*, Christ alone. According to Maas (2010, 40), "The Scripture is the final word and only certain judge of doctrine and practice (*sola scriptura*)-human traditions, reason, or churchly authority." Scripture is applied by distinguishing Law and Gospel as a carefully interpretive principle in understanding the Bible (Maas 2010, 41). The Law and Gospel are very helpful in scriptural interpretation to make a distinction between the law and grace. Nürnberger (2005, 41) states the Evangelical Lutheran Church teaches:

> We are saved by grace alone (*sola gracia*), but also that we are saved by faith alone (*sola fide*). In both cases, the word "alone" is used. So, grace and faith must refer to the same act of God operative in human reality. There is no contradiction between grace and faith because it is grace that creates faith and it is faith that accepts grace.

People are saved by the action and grace of God through Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and was resurrected (Veith 2010, 41–42). In Christ alone (*solus Christus*), the salvation of people in Christ is certain because of the promise contained in the gospel (Nürnberger 2005, 224).

Where Does the Form of Lutheran Liturgy Come from?

The Evangelical Lutheran Church liturgy, vestments, and music originate from the sources of the *sola scripture*, scripture alone, and the tradition of the early church. The Old Testament gives a historical use of vestments. The priestly garments were of ancient origin. Scripture gives evidence that Moses was appointed by God to build the Temple and the instructions on the use of garments by the priests (Exodus 26–28). Priestly vestments within the Christian church were associated with medieval church ritualists, with reference to the priestly garments of the Old Testament. "Vestments became the official costume or robe of office, and hence only part of the logical treatment of worship as a public act" (Reppeto 1974, 11). Jesus Christ, vested in sacred vestments, was regarded as the High Priest with reference to the Old Testament. The significance of the sacred vestment points to Jesus Christ and His Atonement based on scripture (Parry 2021, 20; 25–26).

The Lutheran Book of Concord affirms this as "it is not safe to institute an act of worship in the church without the authority of scripture" (Kolb and Wengert 2000, 275). According to Althaus (1970, 5), "The Scripture is the record of the apostolic witness to Christ and is as such the decisive authority in the church." An idea worship with an altar, altar covering vestments and candles. Pastors wear vestments when they conduct worship services as prescribed for priests in the Old Testament. Over the centuries, there were variations in patterns of vestments worn by priests in the Old Testament. Jesus

Christ used vestments in temples and synagogues (Buthelezi 1994, 1–2). Early Christians shared the temple of Jerusalem with non-Christian Israelites for their church services. Private homes were used as worship places (Berglund 1967, 1).

The structure of liturgy is traced from the *Introits*, which are taken largely from the Old Testament in the book of Psalms. The *Kyrie Eleison* means "Lord, have mercy on us." It is based on Psalm 25:16; 51:1; Matthew 9:27, and so on. The *Gloria Patri* means "Glory be to God." It is a based on Romans 16:27; Revelations 1:6. *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* means "Glory to God in the highest" and is based on Luke 2:14. The salutation, "the Lord be with you" is based on Ruth 2:4; Judges 6:12. The blessing phrase, "The Lord be with you and keep You" is based on Number 6:22–27 (Buthelezi 1994, 2).

From the Lutheran Mission Societies into Synods

The history of ELCSA can be traced within its Lutheran mission societies. Moravian Mission Society was the first to arrive in South Africa in 1737. The second was the Berlin Mission Society (BMS) in 1834, followed by Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) in 1843. The Norwegian Schreuder Mission broke away from NMS in 1873, then Hermannsburg Mission Society (HMS) in 1855 and Church of Sweden Mission (CSM) in 1876. The Norwegian Schreuder Mission was later taken over by the American Lutheran Mission in 1927 (Schlyter 1953, 3; Mutshekwane 1976, 1; Strassberger 1974, 64–65; Mashabela 2020, 1). "Lutheran Mission societies in South operated under the shadow of colonialism and apartheid which has segmented the societies into ethnic groups. Inevitably, the missionaries fell into the trap of established synods and regional churches along tribal or ethnic lines" (Zulu 2025, 8). In 1911, the black BMS congregations were the first to establish their own synods under the name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA), and white congregations established their synods later. The Black synods were the ELCSA Northern Synod and the ELCSA Southern Synod in the Transvaal (Mutshekwane 1976, 2; Moabelo and Ledwaba 1960, 1; 5). In Natal and Zululand, BMS congregations established their ELCSA Zulu Xhosa Swazi Synod (Christianenburg Assembly 1958, Zikode undated, 27; Mutshekwane 1976, 8). The consolidation of BMS congregations into a structured synod was under the leadership of white superintendents. Black churches became independent through the establishment of these synods, although they continued with a dominant theology influenced by the white missionaries (Mutshekwane 1976, 2; Moabelo and Ledwaba 1960, 1; 5). "The internal divisions within Lutheranism have continued to prevent effective engagement in external struggles for justice" (Winkler 1989, vi). BMS uniformity constitution was achieved as early as 1912. HMS formed their synods later than the BMS (Winkler 1989, vi; 72). Cooperating Lutheran Missions (CLM) was established by BMS, CSM, and NMS in Dundee, Natal, at their General Lutheran Conference on 12–13 January 1910. One of its tasks was to achieve unity and develop liturgical similarities of various synods to establish the one Zulu Lutheran Church in Natal and Zululand (Mashabela 2020, 25; Mamba 2006, 18). The traditional mission societies' liturgies were formed from their different Western contexts, which

were difficult to merge and implement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in an African context without considering, engaging, and developing the existential power of the African Spirituality and culture. The Evangelical Lutheran liturgy has not fully addressed African Spirituality and the realities of African Lutherans in their African soil.

From Synodical Period to Regional Churches

The synodical establishment was followed by a need to establish regional churches. According to Florin (1965, 67),

> The fact that Lutherans in South Africa are today organized in Regional Churches is not only the result of coincidental mission history. It is true that individual mission agencies concentrated on certain African tribes or larger language groups, thus setting the pattern for differentiation according to ethnic lines. This pattern was, however, quite consciously reaffirmed in 1958 at the Constituent Assembly held at Christianenburg mission station at New Germany, Natal.

Black synods in South Africa and South West Africa advocated and pressed for the united Evangelical Lutheran Church at its Constituent Assembly in Christianenburg mission station, Durban, Natal, on 16–19 October 1958. German or white synods were not in favour of this church unity as they stressed their German culture and language and supported the government's apartheid policy. This made a merger with Black synods very difficult. However, Black synods decided to implement the formation of regional churches and a united Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Christianenburg Assembly 1958). The 1958 Lutheran Constituent Assembly was a crucial step towards Lutheran unity, although there were disagreements between Black Lutheran synods and white synods. This was a stumbling block towards a true Lutheran unity in Southern Africa. Thus, the formation of liturgy within a regional church structure was a struggle, and it required Lutheran unity to be effective.

ELCSA Zulu Xhosa Swazi Region was the first to be established in Southern Africa at the Christianenburg Constituent Assembly in October 1958. Later, ELCSA Zulu Xhosa Swazi Region was renamed ELCSA South-eastern Region (ELCSASER) (Mutshekwane 1976, 8). BMS Constituent Assembly established the ELCSA Transvaal Region (ELCSATVLR) or Transvaal Regional Church in 1959 (Schlag 1966, 38–-39; Mutshekwane 1976, 2; Moabelo and Ledwaba 1960, 1). On 29 November to 1 December 1959, HMS Tswana Synod Region, originally named the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Batswana Church, held its Constituent Assembly at Marang and established the Evangelical Lutheran Batswana Church, later renamed Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Tswana Region (ELCSATR) (Schlag 1966, 38; Mutshekwane 1976, 1–2; Voges 2000, 75–77). The Constituting Assembly of ELCSA Orange Free State Synod Region of BMS and ELCSA Cape Synod Region of BMS established the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa Cape Orange Region (ELCSACOR) in 1963 (Lislerud 1993, 2; Dlamini 1984, 3). The Lutheran unity in

Southern Africa was always a priority despite some difficulties in various traditions of mission societies.

Towards Establishing the United Church or One ELCSA in the 1970s

> In early 1973, the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA) Committee of Unity and Merger matters, ELCSA South Eastern Region, ELCSA Transvaal Region, ELCSA Tswana Region bishops initiated the process on merger conversations to establish a one and united Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Zulu 2025, 18).

According to Zulu (2025, 18), A closer unity of ELCSA was established by the FELCSA Committee of Unity and Merger. The climax of ELCSA's unity was determined by its Constituent General Assembly held at Tlhabane, Rustenburg, South Africa, on 15–20 December 1975. Zulu (2025, 18) states:

> Many did not want to see the commotion of that merger. There were attempts at preventing the proceedings. A petrol bomb was thrown in the midst of assembly with some delegates sustain some injuries. This incident did to come as a surprise since they were living in a divided society. ELCSA was formed on 18 December 1975. ELCSA became a black Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The church music and liturgy were developed out of this historical background of ELCSA. Church music and liturgy trace their background to Lutheran mission societies, synods, and regional churches' defining developmental moments. The missionary societies' contribution to establishing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and Africa should be highly appreciated. This is a greater achievement for mission and evangelism in planting the Evangelical Lutheran Church in an African soil.

Liturgical Unity and Diversity in a Synodical Church Period

Previously, each Lutheran mission society had its own liturgy. In the early Lutheran Conferences of missionaries, the common liturgy's needs were addressed. The first fruit was the fellowship publication of a common Zulu hymnal and the translation of Martin Luther's Small Catechism in 1897. This includes a Lutheran periodical magazine *Isithunywa*. CLM took over these projects, which was an influence in bringing the Lutherans together (Homdrom 1962,9–10). Lutheran unity in Natal and Zululand was very important for Lutheran mission societies. Thus, the issue of church music and liturgy was part of this central Lutheran unity. The spirit of unity or merger was not easy to be implemented to form a merger amongst Zulu Lutheran congregations due to these various Lutheran mission societies' traditions. Lutheran mission societies commonly agreed on inheriting the Evangelical Lutheran Church Book of Concord, which was referred to as the confessional documents and doctrine. However, the reasons for the difficulty of unity were not confessionally centred but were administrative and practical. The spirit of unity grew until the late 1950s, when negotiations reached a point of action.

The question of confessionally centred means mission societies agreed with the Lutheran doctrine. They differed on administrative and practical issues because each society had its own different administrative style. For example, BMS and HMS did not have a bishop as a leader, while the CSM had a bishop as its leader. The liturgical practices became a reality due to "disagreements lingered over vestments, leadership (Bishop or Superintendent), salaries of workers, etc" (Makhathini 1975, 135). This development under the CLM platform was central to facilitating a process of Lutheran unity and merger in Natal and Zululand during a difficult period to bring and find workable solutions of difference traditional mission societies.

The second contributors towards Lutheran unity and merger were the unity talks in the ELCSA Zulu Xhosa Swazi Synod, which continued, as its pastors, meeting theologically, discussed the different Lutheran missionary societies' traditions of the role of pastors in administering Holy Communion. Pastors' church works were primarily influenced by their own missionary background, such as BMS, HMS, CSM, and American Lutheran Mission (ALM). This included various vestment types from these traditions, for example, albs and chasubles were used by CSM, while BMS and HMS were using the talar during Holy Communion (Mamba 2006, 20–21). Unity talks decided first on liturgical matters, such as a celebrant pastor would not receive Holy Communion in front of the altar, but he would kneel and receive it where the congregation knelt. Second, he would not give himself the Holy Communion, but another pastor present would give him. If there were no other pastor present, he would give himself the Holy Communion. Thirdly, another pastor would declare the words of absolution if the pastor in charge of the parish so desired. The meeting also addressed the ecclesiastical vestments matter, such as all pastors would be allowed to use chasubles during the divine service because African pastors were not allowed to wear them, as the wearing of chasubles was predominantly used by the Church of Sweden Mission pastors only. This continued to be a matter under discussion in the unity talks (ZXSS Pastors' Minutes 1950).

During the synodal period, synods gradually decided to merge and accepted an episcopal leadership style. Synods ensured that, constitutionally, a bishop would not have a final word. They were afraid of the authority of a bishop. After the formation of ELCSASER, a Black bishop was elected, and some white missionaries resigned and left the church because they did not want to serve under Black leadership. Some returned to their homes overseas, and others decided to serve white congregations (Makhathini 1975, 135). The formation of ELCSA regional churches was part of the transformation and empowerment of Black church leaders, which led white missionaries not to be comfortable with being led by the new Black clergy or leadership. These missionaries were previously comfortable with colonial power influence, as they were in full control of church leadership without the Black leadership in power. The elevation of Black leaders to higher church positions was not intended to undermine the historical contribution of missionaries to the church, but to promote equality amongst church leaders and eliminate racism.

The CLM Liturgical Committee produced a new Common Agenda called the Lutheran Altar Book in 1957, except for the involvement of the Hanoverian Free Lutheran Church. The Hanoverian Free Lutheran Church wanted to keep its historical Agenda and independence, which was appealing to its background and theology. The continuation process of the common vestments was finally approved in 1954. For years, Zulus had translated the Bible, which was not a good translation. CLM appointed a Bible Revision Committee, which began its task before the Second World War occurred from 1939 to 1945. The CLM worked with the Natal Mission Conference to complete this scholarly revision of the Bible. The British and Foreign Bible Society had such a type of Bible scholarly work. CSM released Rev. O Sarndal for the full-time Bible Translation for more rapidly where the New Testament was revised in Zulu New Testament and published in 1953 and followed by the publication of the full Bible in 1959 after a serious delay by the Native Affairs Department of the South African government (Homdrom 1962, 10).

Church Building Theology

Why is the church building so central to the church music and liturgy? This is linked to a specific church doctrine. According to Kok (1967, 7):

> One stood in admiration in front of a church building and said: "What a lovely church building!" without first making clear to oneself whether this church building subordinates itself to the teachings of the Church.

The identity of the church teachings is central to the church building, informed by a spiritual point of view. A view of "What a lovely church!" should be an inspiration influenced by the church's teachings. The pastor should draw architects to the church's teachings, while they keep their artistic vocation.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church's doctrine of the Word of God and Sacraments is at the centre of the church's music and liturgy. According to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church confessions, there are three church marks known as the Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion. The pulpit was built alongside the altar as the Word of God in the Evangelical Lutheran tradition is supreme to give life to all spiritual aspects. "The Church is where the Gospel is taught purely, and the Sacraments are administered rightly. So, the theology of these is to be considered in the church building as they are an essential course of the communion of believers" (Kok 1967, 5). The Evangelical Lutheran Church was focused on the pulpit, where one learns of Jesus Christ in words, and the altar in the blessed sacrament of his body and blood. This was the characteristic of the Lutheran devotion and art (Engelbrecht 2010, xiii). There are many types of buildings in the world, such as houses, offices, and shops with various grocery shelves and others, but the church building clearly was set apart by the liturgy of the pulpit and altar. Pastors were entrusted with their office to provide the architect with a thorough theological and liturgical guide for building the church. Some pastors

leave the responsibility of building the church to lay people. This creates a liturgical crisis in the church building. The pastor should provide a spiritual intersectionality between worship and the art of the church building. The pastor cannot do this properly without thoroughly researching or knowing about the church doctrine.

The ELCSA liturgy is intertwined with the church building, and its general furnishings pattern emanates from the Jewish temple and the synagogue. This is about a concept of the house of worship with an altar and pulpit. Jesus Christ even defended the dignity or holiness of the temple when he drove out money changers (Buthelezi 1994, 1). Kok (1967, 4) states:

> The Lutheran tradition is Christo-centric through and through God is the God who is revealed in Christ. The worship of Christ centers in the entire Christ-dead, from birth through death and resurrection to His Real Presence in the house of God, the Church.

It was only under the leadership of Constantine the Great that the church buildings with a church architecture started to emerge. Christian faith demanded that Christians gather for "mutual edification, prayer, receiving from God, His gifts bestowed on the believers and His instructions to them" (Berglund 1967, 1). This resulted in a necessity for building a set aside for the purpose of the meeting place between God and the congregation. The church building had a very defined purpose, its structure and furnishing to encourage and prepare Christians for a dedicated encounter with God (Berglund 1967, 1). The church is necessary as a spiritual shelter, providing security and quality, as a set-apart and special building for worship. The church building had meaning and should speak not only to church members but also to those outside. "It is the place where we are what we really are: the household of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His possession" (Kok 1967, 5). The church building was meant to preach as a way of attracting people to come to church services. A church building that is not maintained would not be attractive to its community. It would also be a dangerous space of worship because congregants would be worshipping in an unsafe space.

Today, God's altar is occupied with artificial flowers. Hallendorff (1967, 14) states:

> Under no circumstances should plastic or paper followers be permitted at the altar. These are dead and artificial and should not replace living, fresh flowers. Followers should be removed before they fade or fall.

ELCSA should establish its ecoliturgical committee, and all its structures, including congregations, should have this committee. The ecoliturgical should identify people who are passionate about planting flowers within the church yard to cut costs to the church. Some flowers can be sold to the community, individuals, families, and events such as weddings to sustain this planting flower project. The Confirmation Class candidates can also participate in flower planting, guided by existing project people as part of their learning and for some who view this as a business opportunity.

Church buildings were built according to the Lutheran Mission Society's traditions, which emerged from the Western world and were imposed on the Southern African context and Africa. According to Kok (1967, 4), "there is a vast consensus of opinion, especially in Africa, whether church architecture should follow classical styles with a contemporary tinge or whether an African contribution should be introduced." The significance of the African art and life granted by God is unapologetically central to building the church buildings from an African perspective. The sense of building the church from the African art and life is communal and appealing to African people rather than just a Westernised church building. This is a primary theology of the church building in Africa. The African hut houses should be used as part of building churches or other buildings, which should be part of the Africanisation of church buildings.

Dignity of a Vestry: Not a Storeroom

The vestry was regarded as a place of dignity in preparation for the divine service. According to Hallendorff (1967, 13), "The vestry is a sacred place, forming an integral part of the house of God. It is here that the pastor prepares himself in prayer and meditation before he enters the sanctuary." The vestry is not a storeroom where boxes and empty wine bottles are kept. It is a place where the pastor pastorally ministers her, or his congregants and a crucifix should be on the wall. It is not a place where administrative meetings are held (Hallendorff 1967, 13). A vestry is a peaceful and healing place to enable congregants to receive their spiritual support from the pastor. In ELCSA church buildings, most of the vestries include a platform for meetings instead of meditation and pastoral support. Pastors have a responsibility to re-educate themselves and their congregations about the significance of the vestry. In this case, it is important to ensure that the Ecoliturgical Committee is established at congregations with a responsibility of reminding pastors and congregants about the significance of a vestry. The pastor's office should be separate from the vestry. This committee must include pastors or deans or bishops or presiding bishop, an architect or architects and builders, and a finance planning committee according to congregational, parish, circuit, diocese, and churchwide structures. Its function is about building projects, looking after the church environment and other issues related to land administration and questions, including land claims. It reports to the relevant congregational council as it operates under it, and those that operate under the parish council, or circuit council, or diocesan council or churchwide council.

ELCSA should give clear guidelines that a vestry remains a prayer and meditation space. Thus, ELCSA church buildings should include boardrooms for various church meetings to be held, workshops and seminars, and pastoral care and counselling buildings should have their own buildings. The church infrastructure should be relevant to all activities of the church, from the congregational level to the churchwide.

Caring for God's House is Neglected

In the 21st century, ELCSA leadership congregations have neglected the ministry of caring for God's house or church buildings. Few congregational leaders maintain church buildings and yards. Many ELCSA church buildings do not meet the expectations in terms of quality and security. Some church buildings are not maintained, and these include the mission house, diocesan centres, yard and toilets. In addition, children still attend their church services and activities outside the church building because there are no formal buildings for them. Furthermore, there are no historical archives offices or archival committees at congregations. New buildings and altars were built without the influence of the Lutheran teachings. There are still long-standing buildings to be complemented and others to be repaired. However, this is not only an ELCSA problem. Other old existing historical or established churches, African Independent Churches, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, also face these problems. God expects ELCSA leadership, congregations and all its structures to take care of their church buildings. "The church should be well looked after and care for in very detail, just as are our earthly homes. Being aware of the truth that the church is God's house as well as our home" (Muller-Nedebock 1967, 10). This should be the ELCSA members' attitude and responsibility to their church buildings. The 50th ELCSA Golden Jubilee Celebration should reflect on the church buildings, based on Evangelical Lutheran Church teachings and determine whether any ecoliturgical committees ensure the quality and security of church buildings.

The pastor and the parish or congregational council, and other church structural councils, are responsible for looking after the church building. The church building should be maintained, renovated, and always cleaned. The pastor always theologically ponders about the church building (Hallendorff 1967, 12). This includes the whole yard of the church building. A congregational or parish council should not be burdened with issues of church building insurance, assets, and other logistics. The Ecoliturgical Committee, with skilled environmental people and those passionate about this committee's work, should be established within congregations and other ELCSA structures to ensure that there are regular reports on the state of the church building and surroundings reported to the relevant councils.

Church Music or Hymnology

Martin Luther composed many hymns and their lyrics through his theological, meaningful, and understanding of music to enable and teach the whole congregation through an understanding of the scriptural message (Steinert and Karecki 2004, 473). He passionately developed a collective of various musical traditions that include the liturgical chant, medieval music, and other songs (Foley 1987,407). The history of Lutheran hymnody follows Luther's contribution to his hymn-singing tradition and is a fixed part of Lutheran worship. The talented people who worshipped with Luther within the Roman Catholic Church wrote hymns and metrical psalm paraphrases in German.

This formed part of enhancing musical and poetic talent in the liturgy. This contributed to the Reformation Theology to reach out to illiterate people, classes as "songs were used not only to praise but also to preach and teach" (Tonsing 2013, 2). Lutheran mission societies inherited Luther's and reformation traditions of music and liturgy, which later impacted the life of ELCSA. Luther adapted popular secular and religious tunes, including student songs, for his hymns using a technique called contrafact to create music that was familiar to the congregation and promoted his reforming ideas. He did not simply rewrite secular songs but applied new Protestant theological texts to pre-existing, well-known melodies to facilitate congregational singing and Christian education.

The ELCSA hymn singing originates from the Old Testament in the book of Psalms, Matthew 26:30 and Ephesians 5:19 in the New Testament (Buthelezi 1994, 2). At the beginning of World War I, which occurred from 1914 to 1918, the Lutheran Conference of missionaries in Natal and Zululand stressed the need for literature such as a hymnbook with notes, a uniform pericope series, an ABC Zulu spelling book and a manual of church history. CLM did very great work in developing literature and liturgy for over thirty years. Its Lutheran Book Concern published various kinds of literature, and in 1953, CLM decided to rename it the Lutheran Publishing House, which was established in the central city of Durban. The first *Credo Lutheran Theological Journal for Southern Africa* (CLTJSA) was published in 1956 by the Lutheran Publishing House under CLM and with the financial support of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It was printed in the official languages of South Africa, such as Northern Sotho or Sepedi, Vhenda, Zulu, Xhosa and English. CLTJSA published four issues annually, and African pastors were also contributing their theological writings from an African perspective. Formation of a common agenda, music and liturgy was influenced by the fact that congregations were independent and could not operate in isolation (Homdrom 1962, 9–10, Winkler 1989, 39; 73).

HMS did not use the CLM hymnal edition due to its stuck Hermannsburg tradition. It worked on its own hymnal through its Hymnal Committee, which published its hymnbook in 1956 (Homdrom 1962, 10).

Liturgy and Worship

The Lutheran principle and tradition of adiaphora are church practices and teachings which do not affect the essence of Christian faith, which could be left to individual freedom for a spiritual and contextual decision. For this reason, Lutherans allow for or maybe tolerate variety even among themselves on patterns of worship. They were not even difficult, even though there were differences compared to other denominations. They only object when it is against the necessary standards of the Gospel. For Nsibande (1981, 89):

> Lutherans can unhesitatingly use any form of worship. If, however, it is insisted that a particular form of worship must be used, in order to hold a legitimately Christian worship, Lutherans would have to object. In such a case a church practice is altered from a matter of *bene esse* (a beneficial matter) to *an esse* (an essential matter) in the life of the church.

The Lutheran principle and tradition of adiaphora was central for the unity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was essential for the cooperation of Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa.

Furthermore:

> Lutheran practice allows full freedom in matters not directly affecting the Gospel and the Sacraments, but any attempt to endanger that freedom in matters not directly affecting the Gospel and the Sacraments, but any attempt to endanger that freedom must be rejected as an attack on the Gospel. This principle is intended to ensure that the Gospel remains the heart of the church worship (Nsibande 1981, 89).

According to Buthelezi (1994, 1):

> Liturgy is a fixed and public form of worshipping God which is authorized by the church for use by a congregation in prescribed services. This liturgy prescribes when and how we should pray, sing and read God's Word and who should do these things in a given setting. A service which follows a prescribed form is called a liturgical service or worship.

This means liturgy in ELCSA is founded on *sola scriptura*, scripture alone; thus, anything outside the *sola scriptura* is not the Lutheran liturgy. The Gospel is very central in shaping the Lutheran liturgy. Liturgically, only ordained pastors can administer Holy Communion and conduct Baptism. The pastor is responsible for leading people in the worship of God during Sunday services. Under the guidance of the pastor, lay people may lead services in preaching, conducting liturgy, and leading in singing. Lay people who participate in the service assist the pastor in running the service. They do not take over the pastor's responsibility (Buthelezi 1994,1).

Liturgical Colours and Vestments of the Church

ELCSA regional churches adopted liturgical colours, church robes, and gestures according to the Western practices (Nsibande 1981, 89). The Evangelical Lutheran Church uses four colours to signify the seasons of the liturgical church year (Buthelezi 1994, 2). The colour purple is used for mourning during Advent and Lent. The colour signifying joy and celebration during the Christmas and Easter seasons is white or cream white. Green symbolises growth, normally used during the Trinity celebration. Red symbolises the presence and celebration of the Holy Spirit. It is used during Pentecost and ordination celebrations. These colours are used on the altar and pulpit vestments and vestments for pastors (Buthelezi 1994, 2). Theological rationale for church

vestments was biblically traced in the Old Testament symbol of purity, beauty, and authority. For purity, in worship, people encounter the Holy God who requires them to be holy. God, the creator, created beautiful people and the world. God has given authority to a pastor or bishop to serve the people with dignity, but this authority belongs to the church (Biyela 2024, 267–269).

Africanising and Decolonising ELCSA Liturgy

ELCSA is still struggling to find a productive liturgical meaning to African Lutherans because of various entrenched Lutheran mission society traditions of liturgy, although it has made decisions on liturgical unity and practice. The need to contextualise Christianity in ELCSA regional churches was very little in practice in connection to liturgy. The Black churches inherited the confessional Lutheran debates of HMS to retain their pure Lutheran liturgy and BMS to return its own as well. This dates back from congregational into consolidation to synods and later regional churches. The question of Africanising the liturgy matters through a critical history amongst African Lutheran congregations (Winkler 1989, 79). The liturgy and music used in worship services were instilled and influenced by traditional liturgies of Lutheran missions and historical churches. ELCSA regional churches still followed the ways of worship as practised in Europe and America, although such ways do not even fulfil the hearts of African people. In worship, indigenous Christians wish to view African Lutheran congregations liberated from the European and American domination style of worship. ELCSA regional churches should view African culture and religious traditions as positive development towards Africanising and decolonising the Lutheran liturgy in Africa (Nsibande 1981, 89–90). If the Evangelical Lutheran Church needs to be relevant to the African people, it should establish the liturgical tradition according to the African traditional pattern of life.

Many Evangelical Lutheran Church members in Africa were trying to use or imitate certain African Independent Churches (AIC) styles of worship. This is a result of not being touched by Western music with Western hymns, tunes, and instruments, which African congregants were forced to sit down during singing, prohibited from dancing and clapping their hands and emotions were suppressed in worship services. ELCSA regional churches could be free to set up their own way of worship to reach out and touch the hearts of the African people. There was a desire among indigenous people that African traditional songs were supposed to be used in worship service (Nsibande 1981, 90–91). AIC music was influenced by drums, flutes of reeds, and dancing styles of old African modes. Hymns were recitations of short biblical verses, and drums formed a background for the chanting. Unfortunately, Evangelical Lutheran Church and other mission or historical churches viewed AIC modes of music as heathenism, but in African Lutheran congregations, such music modes were used to fulfil their spirituality (Mabaso 1964,21–22).

Part of Africanising the regional churches is to celebrate the Lord's Supper with African food and drinks. The use of the Lutheran principle of adiaphora could not create any problem about this setting of the Holy Communion celebration. Nsibande (1981, 91) says:

> The cultural accommodation of Christianity to African customs, seems to be a legitimate demand on the side of indigenous Christians. The central aim is to make Christianity truly indigenous and at home in Africa, so that it really becomes meaningful to the indigenous people.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa would claim its heritage of mission and worship with a sense of being sensitive to its African people's music and culture. African people developed choruses from scriptures to contextualise and enrich the Lutheran liturgy. These African choruses enable African people "to internalise the gospel and so transform their lives" (Steinert and Karecki 2004, 472–473). African choruses are not foreign to the Lutheran doctrine as African Lutherans develop their choruses from *sola scriptura* as a means to advance and Africanise ELCSA liturgy. What ELCSA should do is to incorporate these African scriptural choruses into its Lutheran hymnbook. This will enrich the Lutheran liturgy and music within ELCSA congregations.

For Africanising the liturgy, Lutheran Theology and *sola scripture* should be engaged and aligned with the African context and concepts. Christianity in its infancy was nurtured and fed from Africa (Alexandria, Carthage, Ethiopia, and so on). ELCSA consists of Africans; thus, it should embrace the early history of Christianity. For ELCSA liturgy to be relevant, dancing, clapping of hands, drums, and other forms of instruments should be fully allowed throughout the ELCSA church. Some parish leaders do not allow such practices to benefit church members spiritually. ELCSA liturgy can be truly Africanised and decolonised when dancing, clapping of hands and other forms of worship are practised in an orderly way, as ELCSA is the church of order.

Healing Aspects during Divine Services

According Beyerhaus (1965, 3), Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa "still have to find a liturgy which can be regarded as the true expression of the African response to the message of redemption in Christ. Probably the healing aspect of the means of grace will have to be discovered and accentuated anew." The Evangelical Lutheran Church had not fully explored the power of the Holy Spirit, who heals the sick, drives out demons during divine services (Makhathini 1965:3). Lutheran Theology emphasised the Word of God and Holy Communion as a central church healing sacrament; the other aspect was medical healing at a hospital (Ludwig 1999, 209). Furthermore, there is a liturgical confession of believing in God's healing intertwined with praising and glory to God (Mamba 2006, 126).

African Lutherans are missing the liturgy of the healing ministry of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. ELCSA congregations hold revivals with laying on of hands and exorcism, which are part of allowing the Holy Spirit to heal the sick, encourage and pray for those who need prayers for various reasons. This is one of the positive needs of the Lutheran Spirituality. This ELCSA approach to healing is practised rarely. This type of healing service is practised in several parishes and during Easter services. Congregational members are missing the liturgy of the healing ministry of the church, such as when they are sick, they seek to attend AIC services, as their services cannot end without a healing service.

Recommendations

ELCSA should engage with the highlighted areas:

a) It is appropriate to embrace and commemorate ELCSA's 50th Golden Jubilee and its liturgy and recognise the contribution of Lutheran missionaries to present Lutheran liturgy and music to congregations in the early establishment of Lutheranism in Southern Africa until ELCSA. Lutheran liturgy in ELCSA should be reformed and aligned with the *sola scriptura*, a revision of the early history of Christianity that originated, nurtured, and developed from Africa in areas such as Alexandria, Carthage, Ethiopia and others, and African culture and context. The liturgical committee in all ELCSA levels should visit ELCSA archives, conduct interviews and find out whether there was a call for the Africanisation of ELCSA liturgy. This will assist in developing an informed Africanised ELCSA liturgy.

b) Liturgy should also be gender inclusive of God not only as the Father, but also as the Mother. Some old men use their African cultures not to receive Holy Communion from ordained women. This should be researched, and men should be engaged on why they should accept and receive Holy Communion from ordained women as equals with men. The word "men" in liturgy and liturgical books should be replaced by "women and men."

c) ELCSA should prioritise its healing ministry within its church services to prioritise spiritual delivery. Develop an integrated healing liturgy within its normal Sunday services to address the issue of healing and health. Integrated liturgy includes the normal order of the Lutheran Sunday liturgy, which should include the liturgy on healing, such as the laying on of hands and others. Lutherans and people in general need healing, which matters for the health and life of the people of God. Healing services are central to African Spirituality and realities, as ELCSA should practice them on a daily basis instead of special events such as revivals. A research team should be appointed to research ELCSA's existing literature on the healing ministry, and interviews should be

held on the AIC healing ministry and African Traditional Religions or Spirituality.

d) The majority of ELCSA congregations have limited buildings, such as the church, vestry, parsonage, and a pastor's office, which were mostly built during the missionaries' area. ELCSA congregational structures should include more various buildings for seminars, boardrooms for meetings, boarding rooms, conference halls, and teaching and learning facilities. ELCSA can benefit financially by inviting institutions, organisations, and individuals to hire its congregational boarding rooms and conference halls. ELCSA organisations such as Prayer Women's Fellowship, Prayer Women's League, Prayer Men's League, Prayer Youth League and Prayer Young Adults League can use their existing ELCSA facilities for their own conferences and other activities instead of paying other institutions every year, but money will be generated for ELCSA to financially sustain itself.

e) ELCSA should develop an awareness campaign for its 50th Golden Jubilee. An awareness campaign to celebrate and commemorate the history of ELCSA cannot end as is necessary for a drive to collect and preserve the past 50 years and to build upon in future. This campaign will be useful in ensuring that all ELCSA archives are collected and organised for present and future purposes of research and publications.

These liturgical recommendations should be developed out of a liturgical campaign, which should not only be a form of engagement but include more teaching and learning. The educational process is central to ensuring that church members understand why there is a need to Africanise and decolonise Lutheran liturgy within ELCSA. This is about what ELCSA believes in, which is Reformation, *ecclesia semper reformanda est*, which means the church must always be reformed or on renewal.

Conclusion

This article has given an overview of liturgy, music and the art of the church building of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. All these aspects are central to worshipping God, influenced by the authority of *sola scriptura*, which is the backbone of the Lutheran doctrine. Liturgy should not be only about worship but also educational. ELCSA should design a policy of building the church, which requires careful discussion and planning from the church teachings. It should have a full-time church building committee led by a pastor, assisted by Lutheran architects and financial experts. This committee should be established at ELCSA congregations. This is to ensure that the church building has a message to the community and safety, and security measures are in place.

ELCSA celebrated its 50 years of Golden Jubilee at Tlhabane, Rustenburg, Northwest Province, South Africa, from 18–21 December 2025, which requires ELCSA to seriously revert to its Reformation Theology, which is urgently needed for ELCSA *ecclesia simpa reformanda*, renewal and transformation to the spirituality, ministry of justice and equality for its church workers, clergy and all workers and its members, and the church's economy. A need for ELCSA to transform, Africanise and decolonise its liturgy in response to the needs of African Lutheran congregations.

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