



St Stephen's

Lutheran Church Adelaide

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Heb 13:8

3rd March, 2023

Dear members of the College of Bishops: Paul, Neville, Lester, Robert, Mark, Mike, David and Mark, and additional members of the GCB: Paul, Kim, Charmaine, Mel, Peter and Tim.

You will have anticipated that we, like many in the church, were disappointed in the behaviour of some at Synod, and also the outcome of the ordination resolutions.

We did, however, gain clarity in understanding that there are a small group of people currently within the LCA, who have no intention of allowing conversation and debate that would enable us to better understand each other and learn to live with diversity; they would rather filibuster and obfuscate. This was clearly an exercise in control and the abuse of power.

Many of us felt that what we experienced at convention was not the church we know, nor the church that has nurtured us. It seemed that we were seeing within the LCA a small, vocal and influential sect, separating themselves from the LCA by refusing to follow the processes and obligations outlined in the *Theses of Agreement* (part of our *Document of Union*). This is where our approach to doctrine is spelled out.

As a church, we have been slow to realise that TA 1 has held the answer to a way forward on the impasse regarding the prohibition of ordination of women. It should have been clear to us in late 1999, when a small group of the CTICR felt the need to release a minority report alongside the official balanced report of the Commission; this demonstrated that there was no agreement on the clarity of scripture regarding the prohibition of ordination for women and therefore that, according to Governing Principle TA 1.4.c, the LCA could not have a doctrine regarding ordination and gender. If we failed to recognise this then, we should have realised at each ensuing Convention where discussion, debate and voting occurred, or as each working group looked at the issue.

It seems we were so focussed on TA 6.11 that we failed to acknowledge that TA 1 provides the overarching principles governing our church fellowship thereby taking precedence over the specific teachings. Using the wording of DSTO 1.A30 (*The status of the Theses ... 1975*), TA 6.11 is part of the "letter" of TA, but the principles guide the "letter and spirit" of the theses.

The report released in 2020 by the College of Bishops and General Church Board, following a special meeting held to discuss the way forward, spelled out clearly that the provisions of TA 1.4.e, regarding our inability to find unanimity and agreement on scriptural clarity, had been met. From this point onward, if not before, no one was rightfully able to assert that the church had a teaching on gender and ordination according to the Principles Governing Church Fellowship for the LCA.

It is surprising that, despite the care the leadership had taken to educate delegates regarding the provisions of the *Theses of Agreement* prior to the 2023 face to face Convention of the General Synod through mailing and the town-hall meetings, this was not followed through by our leaders at the Convention.



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However, that Convention did vote to accept proposal 2.2.9 as amended with an additional clause anticipating the ordination of women shows clearly that the church has now accepted the prohibition is no longer a doctrine of the church.

This has immediate implications. Nothing that excludes people simply on the basis of their gender is now ecclesiological, morally (or legally) appropriate within the LCANZ.

Therefore

- no congregation that requests the licensing for Word and Sacrament of a woman to provide their spiritual care in the absence of an ordained person can be denied this solely on the basis of gender;
- no woman can be denied enrolment in any unit or award at ALC solely on the basis of gender;
- no article should be refused publication in *The Lutheran* purely because it speaks about the ordination of women, or of women preparing for ministry, or some related topic that has seen such prohibitions until now;
- no congregation or pastor can be disciplined for allowing the God-given gifts and graces given to women to be exercised in their local context;
- those congregations who have been led by a woman/women should be encouraged to regularise their leadership, which until now has been met with toleration or “raps over the knuckles” or has practised “under the radar” because of the erroneous prohibition.

We have some further points regarding moving 2.2.9 forward:

1. Who will be providing professional pastoral supervision to the CoB and GCB as they undertake the work assigned to them by Resolution 2.2.9?
2. It is enough for the leadership to declare that in accordance with the article on “Principles Governing Church Fellowship”, there is now no valid doctrine on gender and ordination within the LCANZ, and for the presentation of resultant constitutional changes for ratification at the next Convention; no vote on doctrine need be taken; no resource intensive project team need be set up to work out the logistics – we just need to be the church, with one more aspect to our diversity.
3. Any plan that is divisive of our unity is anathema to us. It would be potentially harmful to the life of congregations for them to be asked to make a decision to tie themselves to one position or another.
4. We do not need the phrasing “two practices of ministry” (even though we recognise we introduced it to the discussion). There is only one practice of ministry, just as there is only one teaching on ministry. Congregations (and other calling bodies) will exercise their right to call the person they feel will best serve them; they will always have the right to consider calling only men, if it has been determined that this is best for the congregation at the time.

And finally, we hope there is a way that our next Convention of General Synod will promote helpful conversation. Perhaps the live streaming of Synod would cause some people to cease disruptive behaviour. Perhaps there can be the provision that any points of order or questions of clarification are taken to an assisting chair and parliamentary adviser, outside of the general discussion, and brought immediately to the chair only once they are seen to not be false or specious.

Please be assured of our continuing prayers for you in the months ahead,

Your sisters and brothers in Christ,

Helen Lockwood, Colleen Fitzpatrick, Christopher Guntner, Bob Kempe, Peter Lockwood, John Strelan, Tanya Wittwer, Susan Wood

Women’s Ordination Sub-committee of St Stephen’s Lutheran Church