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St Stephen's
Lutheran Church Adelaide

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

Why The Lutheran Church Of Australia & New Zealand (LCANZ) Has No Doctrine On Ordination Gender



Recap: What Is the LCANZ?

- The LCANZ (originally LCA) is the negotiated union of two different Australian Lutheran Synods (ELCA & UELCA), primarily in the 1950s (although the “union” itself was only formalised in 1966)*
- After significant debate about their numerous differences these two Synods finally decided that they could “meet in the middle” and operate as a single entity, subject to a substantial number of terms and mutual obligations

** NZ Lutherans joined soon after union as a “District”*



Recap: How was the LCANZ formed?

- The documents which form the ecclesiastical entity of the LCANZ are the Documents Of Union
- The key Document in this group is the Theses Of Agreement (TA), which was endorsed by both Synods some years prior to Union.” *These Theses were adopted by the above Churches at their Conventions held in 1956 and 1959 respectively* ...”* [DSTO Theses Of Agreement](#)

**Section V Theses 17-29 adopted later, in 1965 & 66*



Recap: What Is The Current Status Of The Theses Of Agreement

- The TA were formalised/adopted as the “**official position of the Church**” at the 1975 Convention Of Synod

[The status of the Theses of Agreement and other Doctrinal Statements](#)

- “...the church may adopt a document – amended or unamended – as expressing the official position of the church. This happens when the document is adopted by General Synod, or by the General Church Council on behalf of the church”

[DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS OF THE LCA V1 Forward](#)



But What About The Constitution?

- It is important to understand that the Constitution was created as an obligatory legal/civil document after the LCANZ was formed ecclesiastically. The Constitution is intended to **reflect & align with** the ecclesiastical, doctrinal & fellowship agreements & obligations as agreed to earlier in the Theses Of Agreement & other Documents Of Union.
- The Constitution does **NOT** contain Doctrinal Statements or Theological Opinions (DSTO) of the LCANZ. These are contained in the TA and other [DSTO](#).



What obligations are conveyed by the TA?

- *“In the exercise of their teaching function, whether dealing with a group or a congregation or with individuals, pastors of the LCA should not run counter to the **letter and the spirit** of the Theses of Agreement”*
- *“a deliberate disregard of the Theses in teaching and preaching would appear as evidence of bad faith, and would constitute a serious threat to the unity of the Church.”*

[The status of the Theses of Agreement and other Doctrinal Statements](#)



What is the “*letter & spirit*” of the TA?

- The very first section of the TA (TA1) is titled the **Principles Governing Church Fellowship**.
- “Governing Principle(s)” are variously defined as:
 - “*the agreements which **govern** the purpose or operation*” of an association and “*the **rights and obligations** of its members..*”
 - “*a principle that has the **most important influence** on something*”
 - “*a **fundamental moral rule** that guides and influences how something is done*”
- TA1 therefore conveys the TA’s “letter” and **spirit**



Does TA1 prescribe any rules or obligations regarding LCANZ Public Doctrine?

- TA1 contains a number of commitments and obligations which all LCANZ members are to abide by
- TA1.4 specifies a series of requirements which must be met for **ANY** Theological Opinion (interpretation) to qualify as a Public Doctrine (teaching) of the LCANZ:
 - TA1.4.c. states succinctly that “...***no doctrine can be based on Scripture passages that are not clear...***”



Does TA1 prescribe any rules or obligations regarding LCANZ Public Doctrine?

- TA1.4.e. defines “clarity” as follows : *“In case of differences in exegesis that affect doctrine, agreement on the basis of God’s Word must be sought by combined, prayerful examination of the passages in question.*

If this does not lead to agreement, because no unanimity has been reached on the clarity of the passages in question and hence on the stringency and adequacy of the Scriptural Proof:



Does TA1 prescribe any rules or obligations regarding LCANZ Public Doctrine?

- (cont.) then “*divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are NOT..*” to be:
 - “*divisive of church fellowship*”
 - “*propagated as the publica doctrina of the Church*”



But what about the Lutheran Confessions?

- The Lutheran Confessions (contained in the *Book of Concord* of 1580), which we share with all global Lutheran Churches, do not contain any restriction on ordination gender.
- They cite no biblical justification for limiting ordination to males only, so almost 90% of all worshiping Lutherans globally belong to synods which do not have any restriction on ordination gender (i.e. almost **90%** of the **global Lutheran fellowship** acknowledges that **the bible allows ordination of both women and men equally**)



But what about TA6?

- [TA6](#) contains the LCANZ's Theses on the office of the ministry, adopted by theological subcommittees of the ELCA and UELCA (not specifically adopted by Synod) in 1950
- Clauses 1 to 10 are essentially restatements of the Augsburg Confession (some wording changes)
- Clause 6.11 is a unique negotiated creation of the LCANZ founding theological subcommittees, and cites interpretations of just two bible passages (Cor 14:34,35 and I Tim 2:11–14) as prohibiting the ordination of women



But what about TA6?

- Despite a **Synod majority rejecting** the 1940-50 subcommittee members' majority interpretations of these two passages **at every LCANZ Synod** where a vote on the matter has ever been taken, **misplaced** adherence to TA6.11 means the LCANZ has not joined the 90% of global Lutherans who now acknowledge biblical support for female ordination
- It must be noted that there are other biblical passages which are cited by theologians as both endorsing and prohibiting female ordination, but the historical LCANZ position is justified entirely with reference to these two passages alone



So why is TA6.11 no longer valid?

- TA1, as detailed in slides 7~10, prescribes the “most important” “fundamental” agreed rules and obligations applicable to LCANZ fellowship
- The founders emphatically stressed that “...***no doctrine can be based on Scripture passages that are not clear..***” and if “***no unanimity has been reached on the clarity of the passages in question, then “divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are NOT..”*** to be “***propagated as the publica doctrina of the Church***” (or “***divisive of Church Fellowship***”)



So why is TA6.11 no longer valid?

- The LCANZ has been debating the 2 x passages in TA6.11, and many others, for over 30 years.
- **69%** of [CTICR](#) members endorsed a report to Synod in 2000 advising that there was **no biblical foundation** for prohibiting the ordination of women
- Almost **90%** of global Lutherans, who share the same confessions as the LCANZ, worship in synods whose many theologians concur with this CTICR supermajority (11 out of 16 members') opinion.
- Yet, **30~40%** of LCANZ Synod delegates hold to an opposing interpretation of the same passages



So why is TA6.11 no longer valid?

- The General Church Board (GCB) and College Of Bishops (CoB) acknowledged to the [LCANZ membership in 2020](#) that *“there is no indication that consensus will be reached”* re interpretation of the passages relating to ordination gender
- [2022 General Pastor’s Conference \(GPC\)](#) [reported](#) *“We acknowledge and lament that we are divided in what we believe is revealed in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 as identified in TA 6:11”*. The passages are therefore **“unclear” to the LCANZ** despite equally heartfelt convictions



So why is TA6.11 no longer valid?

- In the absence of LCANZ “**clarity**” (agreement and unanimity) regarding the interpretations of the passages upon which TA6.11 is based, the **Governing Principles TA1.4.c. and TA1.4.e. rule that TA6.11 is not a public doctrine of the LCANZ.**
- The widely conflicting interpretations of the 2 passages in TA6.11 and their context, plus the stark contradiction between TA6.11 and the theological positions of ~90% of the global Lutheran community, demonstrate unequivocally that TA6.11 is not based on “clear” passages as per the ruling of TA1.



Summary?

- In the absence of a valid public doctrine on ordination gender, individual congregations and calling bodies are at liberty to Call both male and female candidates to ordained ministry roles as per their needs and majority convictions
- The LCANZ as an organisation must be mindful of equal opportunity obligations which apply in the absence of a clear whole-church doctrine on gender
- Pastors and leaders of the LCANZ must be mindful of their obligations under the official position of the LCANZ as cited in [slide 6](#)



Summary?

- The LCANZ founders ruled that no doctrine (teaching) of the unified LCANZ could be based on biblical interpretations which the LCANZ membership were unable to reach agreement and unanimity upon.
- This was formalised as a “Governing” (*most important, fundamental, obligatory*) Principle of the LCANZ, adopted by both Synods in the 1950s and re-formalised as an LCANZ official position in 1975.
- Synod has failed to reach agreement/unanimity on interpretation of the texts cited re. ordination gender - hence no doctrine may be claimed or propagated.