

AGENDA 4.2.1

Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations

The Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) is a commission comprised of 16 members LCA members from across the church, lay and ordained, who have experience and qualifications in theology and ministry in various different contexts: Bishop David Altus (SA); Commission Secretary - Rev Dr Stephen Haar (ALC); Churchwide Bishop, John Henderson; Rev Dr Adam Hensley (ALC); Rev Dr Stephen Hultgren (ALC); Steven Liebelt (Hamilton, Vic); Vice chairman - Pastor Fraser Pearce (Adelaide SA); Rev Dr Andrew Pfeiffer (ALC); Pastor Jim Pietsch (Wellington, NZ); Commission Chairman - Rev Dr Stephen Pietsch (ALC); Bishop Lester Priebbenow (Vic); Dr Pauline Simonsen (Palmerston North, NZ); Heidi Smith (Brisbane Qld); Pastor John Strelan (Adelaide); Executive Extra Member - Pastor Tommi Vuorinen (Brisbane, Qld); Pastor James Winderlich (ALC).

We are ably served by our minute secretary and administrative support person, Mrs Kimberley Pfeiffer.

The main work of CTICR is assigned either by General Synod, GCB, CoB or Pastors Conferences. The full plenum of the commission meets normally twice per year, for two days, to work together on the tasks given to us. The ongoing work of the commission between these plenum gatherings is coordinated by the CTICR Executive (comprised of the Chairman, Secretary, Vice-chairman and an extra member).

During the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020, our work was hampered by the inability to meet face to face. Some shorter meetings were held online during this time, but the bulk of the commission's ongoing work was handled by its executive during this time. We are currently moving back to effective 'mixed mode' plenum meetings where some people are together in the same room while others Zoom in.

TASKS UNDERTAKEN IN THIS TRIENNIUM

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

1. During this triennium the commission has overseen significant progress in ecumenical dialogue with the Uniting Church of Australia, which presented its most recent joint Uniting-Lutheran theological statement on Holy Communion, 'At the Table', which is the culmination of the years of ongoing dialogue work done by the joint dialogue teams from both churches. This comprehensive joint statement is moving toward the end of its process of 'reception' in the LCA, in which the CTICR, the pastors conferences and others in the church read and give feedback on the statement.
2. CTICR also finalised additions to the existing Anglican-Lutheran joint statement 'Common Ground', expressing its shared vision and goals in relation to the church's mission.
3. The Roman Catholic – Lutheran joint dialogue team continues to work fruitfully. Its recent topics of discussion have been the Lutheran understanding of and attitude to the papacy and the possible recognition by the Roman Catholic Church of Augsburg Confession (working ahead of the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession coming up in 2030).
4. An additional and most welcome development in the area of ecumenical dialogue has been the initiation of dialogue between the Lutheran Church of New Zealand and the Roman Catholic Church in New Zealand. This new ecumenical initiative grew out of joint Catholic-

Lutheran commemoration activities for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in New Zealand in 2017, and has done significant work, presenting its first joint theological statement, 'Baptised Together In Christ' in January this year. This new Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue works in consultation and cooperation with the LCA's Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue team; both working under the oversight of CTICR.

A major difficulty faced in work in this area is finding suitable and willing LCA pastors and lay persons to serve on ecumenical dialogues teams. Through patient efforts in these last months, we now have our dialogue teams filled, and are thankful for those who have agreed to serve.

THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATED WITH THE LCA'S POSSIBLE MEMBERSHIP IN ILC AND LWF (NOW DISCONTINUED)

At the last General Synod, resolution 2018:0207 initiated an investigation of the theological and church fellowship implications of the LCA in both the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC). This resulted in several initiatives in the church, including CTICR being asked to undertake a theological and doctrinal review of the respective theological positions of ILC and LWF on ecclesiology, and identify the areas which would require further discussion and clarification. We set up a working group of five people who began this work and went a considerable way with it, until it unfortunately was curtailed once again by COVID-19, which brought the plans for proposed discussions with ILC and LWF to an indefinite stop.

FURTHER THEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE SEAL OF CONFESSION

In response to the changing context in which the church now lives; in the wake of the Australia-wide royal commission into child abuse, and in view of changing legislation in some states, removing the rights of clergy to decline to reveal what they have heard in the context of confession, CoB asked CTICR to do further work on the matter of the seal of confession, which is still part of the LCA's public theology and practice. Specifically we were asked to produce a further theological statement on this matter. This work has been undertaken successfully, resulting in the CTICR sending on a 'working paper' to CoB, along with a summary of its discussion on this paper, for their study and further consideration.

RESPONSE TO THE REQUEST FROM COB FOR THEOLOGICAL ADVICE IN REGARD TO THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION ONLINE

As the COVID lockdowns took effect around Australia in March last year, congregations of the LCA began to work through what this meant for their sacramental life, as they explored the possibility of 'online communion' (or 'virtual' communion, as it was referred to for some time). CoB at this time asked CTICR to do some theological research and reflection on this matter, in the very short time frame of a couple of weeks. Because there was simply no time for the plenum to undertake this together, the CTICR Executive took up the task and provided theological advice to CoB, which subsequently informed their theological and pastoral statement to the LCA. This was a demanding task that required intensive work and input in a short timeframe, and serves as an example of how the CTICR (whose work so often remains unseen) serves the LCA as it goes about life of worship.

THEOLOGICAL ADVICE FEEDING INTO THE LCA'S PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

In October last year, once again within a very short timeframe, CTICR was asked by the church to give theological input into the LCA's constitutional review process. Again unable to convene the plenum at short notice, the Executive responded. When the plenum met in December, ahead of the Constitutional Review Forum held to workshop stage 1, they were able to give fuller attention to this important matter and contribute to process appropriately. The Commission

members note that we were advised very late in the process that we were to give input, and that this limited our ability to respond as fully as we may otherwise have done.

THEOLOGICAL ADVICE TO COB ON WORKING WITH PERSON OF CONCERN IN LCA CONGREGATIONS

In response to CoB's request, CTICR have set up a working group to look at theological, pastoral and ethical issues surrounding the involvement and pastoral care of person of concern in the life of the church. This work is in process and promises to be fruitful and helpful. It will be completed soon.

THEOLOGICAL ADVICE FOR GPC ON THE APPLICABILITY OF THESES OF AGREEMENT 1.4 TO THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IS CHURCH DIVISIVE

Most recently, in April this year CoB requested CTICR to prepare background material on Thesis of Agreement 1, 'Principles Governing Church Fellowship' with specific attention to the intent of TA 1.4 and applicability or inapplicability of the process outlined in TA 1 to the ongoing discussion about the ordination of both men and women in the LCA, which threatens to divide the LCA'. This background material is to be completed by June 15, so that it can be provided to the pastors of the church for their reading and reflection ahead of General Pastors Conference in July. Here once again we are undertaking a not insignificant piece of theological research within a very limited time frame. The Executive once again formed a working group to do the major research and writing task, which the Plenum will have the opportunity to review and revise at its meeting in early June. This is in process and will be completed on schedule.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

A major risk to our work in CTICR has been, as for other committees and bodies serving the church, the difficulties brought by COVID-19. For this has brought the particular problem that deep and careful theological discussion, which is what we do, is not conducive to online forms of group interaction – although we have, like everyone else, simply had to work with these means.

The CTICR gladly serves to give theological advice to the church, and we are thankful for the hard work of the commission's members. One area of concern that should be noted, however, is that CTICR have increasingly been asked to produce theological advice within impractically short time frames. We realise that the uncertain times the church is facing have sometimes created unforeseen urgent need for some 'quick theological thinking and input', and we have done our best to respond in such situations. However, for CTICR to be constantly operating in this short turn-around mode is not wise or helpful for the church and should not be relied on. The theology of our church, which guides our decisions in so many areas, needs careful reflection, consultation and mature consideration, and cannot and should not be put together 'on the run'.

As the LCA NZ faces the changes that are now quickly coming upon us, our theology and theological unity and integrity as a church will become more important for our spiritual wellbeing and effectiveness in mission, not less so. Our faithfulness to the confession of the Gospel, as we have it in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, is vitally important as the church faces the growing issue of cultural ideologies that are hostile to the Christian Faith, not to mention the host of other social problems that are developing.

It is important for us in these times therefore to make use of the theological resources we have in CTICR, in order to think through the important decisions that we will have to face, not 'on the

run' in response to immediate and short-term demands and concerns, but wisely, carefully and diligently, making use of the diverse and able people who serve our church in this area.

FINANCE/BUDGET

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY AND INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS

FINANCE REPORT	2020	2019	2018
Expenditure	(630)	(7,628)	(13,496)
Non cash transfers	(408)	0	0
Net result for year	<u>(1,038)</u>	<u>(7,628)</u>	<u>(13,496)</u>
Allocation against LCA accumulated funds	<u>(1,038)</u>	<u>(7,628)</u>	<u>(13,496)</u>