

A Theological Basis for the Ordination of Women and Men

Preface

The 2015 General Convention of the LCA asked the CTICR 'to build on its earlier work regarding the ordination of women and men to develop a draft doctrinal statement for General Pastors Conference and the 19th Convention of Synod that presents a theological basis for the ordination of women and men'.

The initial draft doctrinal statement (DDS) that the CTICR prepared in response to the 2015 convention resolution, and an accompanying commentary, were workshopped at a series of Church-wide consultations in Australia and New Zealand in 2017. Guided by feedback from the consultations the CTICR prepared a new document in the form of six brief biblical and theological theses, titled: *A theological basis for the ordination of women and men: draft doctrinal statement*. It replaces the initial DDS that was presented at the consultations. In response to the second part of the convention resolution, the CTICR has also written a document called: *A theological basis for why the ordination of women and men need not be Church-divisive*. By issuing these two documents the CTICR has fulfilled the synodical request.

The CTICR has also produced two other documents for the guidance of the Church: *A theological basis for the ordination of women and men: background to the draft doctrinal statement*, and *Engaging with the Draft Doctrinal Statement: Reflection arising from the current teaching of the Lutheran Church of Australia*.

The draft doctrinal statement on the ordination of women and men deals only with the inclusion of both women and men in the office of the ministry; it does not seek to reformulate the doctrine of the ordained office, which is given in Theses of Agreement 6.1–10.

The CTICR wishes to acknowledge that not all members support the case for the ordination of women and men, and conversely not all members support the case for the ordination of men only. It also wishes to affirm that all members of the CTICR regard the Scriptures as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and uphold the Lutheran Confessions as the correct exposition of scriptural teaching.

A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND MEN: DRAFT DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Introduction

Both men and women are ordained to the office of the public ministry of the Lutheran Church of Australia for the following reasons:

1. Women and men in the public office continue the ministry of the apostles

The public office of the ministry today is apostolic in the sense that it exists to proclaim and enact the teaching of the apostles. However, the foundational role of the apostles was unique. Therefore, the precedent of male apostles (Acts 1:21,22) does not require that pastors be male today.

2. Women as disciples

Jesus included women in the wider circle of disciples who followed him throughout his ministry, were served by him, and in turn served him (Matt. 12:49,50; 27:55; Mark 10:45; 14:3–9; 15:41; Luke 23:55; 24:22–24,33). When Jesus predicted his impending death and resurrection to the disciples in private, women disciples were among them (Luke 9:18–22; 24:1–12). Women were the first to see the risen Lord and the first to announce his resurrection to the other disciples (Matt. 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–20; Luke 24:4–10; John 20:1–18). As members of the wider circle of Jesus' disciples they were well placed to serve as leaders in the early church's ministries alongside the apostles (Luke 24:13–49; Acts 2:17–21).

3. Ministries of women in the New Testament era

The Holy Spirit led the early Christians to establish a variety of ministries, such as prophets, bishops (overseers), teachers, evangelists, pastors and deacons. Many of these included women. Women served as prophets in Corinth and in Caesarea by the Sea (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 21:9). Phoebe was a deacon (minister) of the church at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1,2), an office occupied also by Epaphras and Timothy (Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). Priscilla was Paul's co-worker in Rome and a teacher of the church (Rom. 16:3; Acts 18:26). Euodia and Syntyche 'struggled in the gospel' alongside Paul in Philippi (Phil. 4:3), Mary, Traephena and Tryphosa 'worked hard' as the church was established in Rome (Rom. 16:6,12), and Junia was 'prominent among the apostles' (Rom. 16:7). The inclusion of women in these significant ministries supports the case for their inclusion in the public office of the ministry today.

4. 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b–37

Regarding 1 Timothy 2:11–15, Paul did not permit women to teach the faith at Ephesus. This restriction was consistent with the practice of the synagogue, and was necessary for the time being to avoid offence, especially to Jewish Christians. In other settings, such as Rome, Philippi, Cenchreae, and Caesarea by the Sea, the same ruling was not in force (Acts 18:26; 21:9; Rom. 16:1–3,6,7,12; Phil. 4:3; compare 1 Tim. 3:12 with Rom. 16:1; and 1 Tim. 2:12

with Acts 18:26). Regarding 1 Corinthians 14:33b–37, the women who served as prophets in Corinth (1 Cor. 11:5; see also 12:28; Eph. 4:11; Acts 21:9) are to be distinguished from the wives referred to at 1 Corinthians 14:34,35. Their questions to their husbands, asking them to explain what was being said, prompted the apostle to warn them not to disrupt worship. He commanded them to ‘keep silent in the churches’ (1 Cor. 14:34,35). This is a specific application of Jesus’ overarching command to love one another (1 Cor. 14:37; see also 8:1; 13:1–13; 14:1; John 13:34; 15:12; 1 John 3:23; 4:21), for the sake of good order in worship (1 Cor. 14:33,40), so that the church may be built up in faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:13; 14:3–5,12,17). Paul prohibited women from teaching the faith at Ephesus, and he regulated the conduct of certain wives during worship at Corinth and across the church, motivated by his overriding missionary concern, to ‘become all things to all people, so that [he] might by all means save some’ (1 Cor. 9:22). Since 1 Timothy 2:11–14 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b–37 do not specifically address the issue of ordination, they cannot be used to support the exclusion of women from the pastoral office.

5. Galatians 3:26–28

The unity of all believers before God through baptism led to a breakthrough in the way that people of Jewish and Gentile background, and masters and slaves, related to one another. Likewise, the new creation in Christ transcends and transforms any barriers built by humans which prohibit the ordination of women. This new creation in Christ enables women, in the midst of ever-changing social and cultural contexts, to serve in the office of the public ministry (Gal. 3:27,28; Acts 10:1–48; Eph. 2:11–22; Gal. 2:11–14; Philem. 16; 1 Cor. 7:21–24; Eph. 6:6–9; Col. 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1,2).

6. Lutheran doctrinal foundations

The article on the office of the public ministry in the Augsburg Confession (AC 5) follows the chief article, justification by faith (AC 4). The overriding concern of the Augsburg Confession is that the gospel of God’s grace and forgiveness in Christ remain central to the teaching and practice of the church. The gospel is the teaching by which the church stands or falls. God has established the pastoral office to ensure that, through the word and the sacraments, people are continually brought to and sustained in faith (AC Apol. 7/8.28). The power of the gospel to accomplish this is not dependent on the preacher, whether male or female, but on God’s promise (Isa. 55:11) and the power of his Spirit.

Conclusion

The ordination of women to the office of the ministry is consistent with the Scriptures, and with the doctrine of the ministry as articulated in the Lutheran Confessions. The inclusion of women in the public ministry does not mean a change to the teaching of the Confessions, but only a change to the LCA’s public teaching that men only may be ordained. Duly called, qualified and authorised persons (AC 14), both male and female, may be ordained, and may exercise the office of the keys, by proclaiming the gospel, pronouncing the absolution, and administering the sacraments (John 20:21–23; Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

Prepared by the CTICR for the General Convention of Synod 2018

Finalised: 12 February 2018

Approved for release by General Church Council: 20 April 2018