

AGENDA 2.3.3

The theological basis for why the ordination of women and men need not be divisive

(See also Agenda 2.2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.4 and 2.3.5, and General Pastors Conference Advice (Agenda 2.1.3), which advises that this proposal should be discussed with Ordination of Both Women and Men proposal/s.)

PROPOSED MOTION

Submitted by Redeemer Lutheran Congregation, Toowoomba Qld

BE IT RESOLVED that the Synod not endorse the CTICR paper *A Theological Basis for why the Ordination of Women and Men need not be Church Divisive*, since it fails to adequately address the theological issues at stake in a way that can be embraced by all, and therefore fails to adequately serve the cause of church unity.

REASONS FOR THE MOTION

1. The CTICR paper referred to above claims that women's ordination need not be church divisive since it does not involve any clear word of Scripture being "denied, contradicted, or ignored" (see paragraph 2 and footnote 2). The problem with this claim is that only one side will agree to it, and such one-sided claims cannot serve the cause of unity. Those who oppose women's ordination have consistently argued that women's ordination does deny, contradict, and ignore both 1 Corinthians 14:33–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14, and this paper simply ignores their perspective.
2. The CTICR paper then argues (in paragraph 3) that women's ordination does not affect a "foundational" or "key" church teaching, and therefore should not be church divisive. This claim is false, and both sides in the women's ordination debate should be able to see that it is false. Women's ordination involves a change in the church's doctrine of ministry. This is not a peripheral doctrinal matter, something that we can simply agree to disagree on without it affecting our unity or cooperation within the body of Christ. Luther did not treat it as peripheral, but listed the office of the public ministry as one of seven marks of the church (*On the Councils and the Church*, LW41, 154–55). Jesus did not treat it as peripheral, when he called and trained his Apostles, and through them chose successors to carry on their ministry of word and sacrament. The New Testament does not treat it as peripheral, when it dedicates three whole books to how those who occupy this office should conduct themselves (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, not to mention many other relevant passages of the New Testament). It is not peripheral because it involves the delivery of the means of grace within the divine service, which is something that stands at the very heart of the church's spiritual life. This is central to how both the church and its unity are understood in the Lutheran theological tradition. For instance, *Augsburg Confession* Article VII defines the church as the assembly of believers gathered around the means of grace. It then defines the unity of the church in terms of this common reception of the means of grace, and not in terms of any institutional structure. This understanding of church unity in terms of a common worship life is reflected in the language of the LCA when we use such expressions as "altar and pulpit fellowship" and "Eucharistic hospitality".
3. The practical consequence of this is that as long as there is a significant group of people who feel bound to oppose it on scriptural grounds, women's ordination has to be church divisive, no matter how much human good-will or desire for unity abounds. If the LCA were to ordain women, those who remain convinced that

God's word prohibits it would not be able to go along with it in good conscience. Those who refuse to violate their conscience would therefore be forced to exclude themselves from any service at which a woman either preaches or presides. This kind of division within the worship life of the church would mean that the church would be divided at its heart, even if the outward human institution held together.

For these reasons it is better that we be honest with ourselves and admit that this issue is church divisive. This is something we should all be able to agree on, regardless of which side it is that we think is the "troubler of Israel"

(1 Kings 18:17–18). Then we can get onto the more important question of "What do we do about it?" Assuming that we fail to break the current theological impasse, and a sizeable minority remains unconvinced one way or the other, how can we live with this division in such a way that the mission of the Gospel is still served and Christian love is maintained? The answer of the CTICR paper, that if women's ordination comes in those who oppose it need to go along with it out of loyalty to the institution while privately holding reservations (paragraph 6), does not take seriously the conscience issue that is at stake. While the CTICR paper gives a brief nod to this issue of conscience in paragraph 7, it fails to recognise what a significant issue this is and how it undoes what the rest of the paper has to say.