

Engaging with the Draft Doctrinal Statement: Reflection arising from the current teaching of the Lutheran Church of Australia¹

1. The current teaching of the LCA is that women cannot be ordained in the church since it is prohibited in the New Testament (TA 6.11). The draft doctrinal statement proposes a change to this teaching, and this document engages with the draft doctrinal statement in the light of the current teaching of the Church.
2. When the New Testament outlines the qualifications a person needs to be called to the pastoral office, it stresses that a pastor must be 'able to teach' (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24; cf. Tit. 1:9). It then prohibits women from doing the kind of authoritative speaking/teaching/ preaching within the divine service that the office requires (1 Cor. 14:33b-38; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).
3. It has been suggested that the texts used in the LCA's prohibition of women from the office of the ministry refer to women not teaching publicly only in Ephesus or not disrupting worship as part of a broader love command. In fact, the texts themselves give specific reasons for the prohibition that are neither time-bound nor culturally-relative, and therefore still apply today. They tell us that the prohibition is grounded in the headship God gave to men at creation (1 Tim. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 14:34), the consequences of the fall for women (1 Tim. 2:14; cf. Gen. 3:16), and a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:36-38). Furthermore, this prohibition applies not only in one local context, but 'in all the churches of the saints' (1 Cor. 14:33b).
4. Exegetical opinion about additional reasons Paul may have had for this prohibition can never overturn the reasons he clearly articulates for us in Scripture. It has been argued that Paul was concerned about the women in Corinth speaking in a disruptive manner, or about avoiding offence in a mainly Jewish culture, which would have violated the law of love and hindered the mission of the Gospel. Paul says little about any of this in the immediate context.² Even if it were shown that there is some truth to them, that would not nullify the reasons Paul spells out for us in Scripture.
5. The case for the male only pastorate hinges on the two passages (1 Cor. 14:33b-38 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15) that speak directly and unambiguously to this issue. Yet, these texts do not stand alone without broader scriptural support. Instead, they find support from all of the following:
 - The example of Jesus, who chose only men to be his Apostles.

¹ In consultation with the College of Bishops this paper has been written in response to feedback from the LCA-wide consultations. The bishops asked the CTICR to 'engage the current teaching of the church with the DDS' in preparation for General Convention. This statement does not express the position of some members of the Commission.

² Neither of these reasons are mentioned at all in 1 Timothy 2. With 1 Corinthians 14 the situation is more complex. Earlier in the chapter Paul addresses disruptive speech by tongue speakers and prophets, and asks them to speak in an orderly manner. Yet when he addresses the women he says nothing about disruptive speech. Instead, he says they should not speak at all, since 'it is shameful for a woman to speak in church'. Given that he does not spell this out further, this could mean 'shameful in God's sight', or 'shameful according to cultural norms', or both. Even if it only means shameful according to cultural norms and not shameful before God, this is a slender basis on which to build an entire case, and does not nullify the other reasons Paul gives for this prohibition.

- The example of Peter, who insisted that the replacement for Judas had to be one of the men who had followed Jesus, not one of the women (Acts 1:21).³
- The parallel between the male only pastorate in the New Testament and the male only priesthood in the Old Testament, the two groups of people chosen by God to preside over the worship life of his people.
- The parallel between the male only pastorate and the spiritual headship of husbands and fathers within their families (Eph. 5:21 – 6:4; cf. Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Tit. 2:3-5).
- Paul’s insistence that a pastor must be ‘husband of one wife’ (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6).
- Paul’s description of pastors as spiritual fathers to the church (1 Cor. 4:15; Philem. 10; Gal. 4:19; 1 Tim. 3:4-5).

Having said this, even if 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 did stand alone, they still stand, since they are part of God’s authoritative word. A teaching does not need to be reiterated several times in Scripture before it becomes authoritative. For example, the third and seventh petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are only taught once (Matt. 6:10, 13), and Baptism is only commanded once (Matt. 28:19).

6. The New Testament’s endorsement of the male-only pastorate is not a reflection of Jewish or Greco-Roman cultural norms. Instead, it is part of the Bible’s teaching on servant headship. It does not give men arbitrary power over women, or pastors arbitrary power over laypeople, but is a call by God to use the authority of Christ’s word to serve in a sacrificial, Christ-like way (Matt. 20:20-28; 1 Pet. 5:3; 2 Cor. 1:24; 4:5; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:3; cf. Eph. 5:22-33a). This call to spiritual responsibility and Christ-like service is counter-cultural in every age.
7. The unity and equal share in God’s kingdom that all Christians enjoy by virtue of our baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29) should eliminate prejudice or partiality that is based on human criteria (James 2:1-9; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:11-14; Eph. 6:9; Col 4:1; Philem. 16; 1 Cor. 7:17-23). However, it does not eliminate distinctions between believers with regard to our earthly vocations that are ordered by God’s word (see for example the 4th Commandment and the Table of Duties in the Lutheran Catechisms).⁴ The Bible does not treat the office of the ministry as something that is open to all Christians by virtue of our common baptism, but as something to which Christ calls specific, duly qualified individuals (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9). And one of the biblical qualifications is that these individuals must be men.
8. The New Testament’s teaching that only men can serve as pastors does not mean that only men can be involved in Christian ministry, as if laypeople are prohibited from sharing the Gospel or engaging in other forms of ministry. The examples we find in the New Testament of women who shared the Gospel (Mary Magdalene in John 20:17-18), prophesied (Philip’s daughters in Acts

³ The Greek word that is used here is *andrōn* (which means men as opposed to women) and not *anthrōpōn* (which can be used generically for either men or women).

⁴ Note also how Paul goes straight from talking about the baptismal unity of all believers within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–13), to talking about this body as something that is made up of many different yet complementary members (1 Cor. 12:14–31). Likewise, the Apostle Peter says in one breath that Christian women should be subordinate to their husbands (1 Pet. 3:1–6), and in the next breath that they are joint heirs with their believing husbands in the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7). There is no conflict between the two, since our standing in God’s sight is not determined by the works we do in vocation, nor is it impaired by how humble our vocations may be in worldly eyes.

21:9),⁵ engaged in Christian service (Phoebe in Rom. 16:1-2), or taught God's word outside of public worship (Priscilla in Acts 18:26), should encourage Christian women today to use their God-given gifts in the service of God's kingdom. Yet these examples do not warrant the conclusion that women can be ordained, since it cannot be demonstrated that any women in the New Testament era served as pastors or in any equivalent role.

Prepared by the CTICR for the General Convention of Synod 2018
Finalised: 21 March 2018

⁵ The meaning of 'speaking in the churches' is clarified by the context. Paul distinguishes this kind of speaking from 'speaking in tongues' (1 Cor. 14:27,28) and the 'speaking' of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29,30).