

What would the LCA gain or lose if it decided to ordain women?

An answer to this question is difficult. In one sense, we don't know what would be gained or lost until any change was made. Even a tentative answer will be determined to some degree by one's perspective. There seems to be at least five perspectives in the LCA about the ordination of women.

1. The ordination of women is forbidden by Scripture and theology.
2. The ordination of women is permitted by Scripture and theology.
3. The arguments have not been convincing. Then two different conclusions are drawn.
 - a. Some are not convinced but are willing to allow the ordination of women to happen.
 - b. Some are not convinced but seek to retain the current teaching of the ordination of men only.
4. There is apathy or lack of interest in the topic.
5. Non Scriptural argumentation for either position is used as the basis for a decision.

In this response we answer the question from the first two perspectives since that has been the basis of the various reports and discussions in the LCA, and is the basis on which teaching is determined.

What would be gained?

1. For some, to call and ordain women would be a clearer expression of the narrative of Scripture and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ makes people new creations in God's kingdom. Having men and women serving side by side as pastors would most clearly demonstrate the equal dignity, call to leadership, and call to service given by God in Genesis 1 and 2, and restored in Christ.
2. An understanding of the authority and nature of Scripture that takes into account recent developments in hermeneutics so that Scripture can be read, understood and taught in new and productive ways.
3. The church could give a powerful witness to the world. Instead of portraying an apparent gender discrimination that can alienate Christians and non-Christians, the demonstration of the Gospel's power to overcome discriminations and to "break down ...walls of hostility" (Eph 2:14) can offer a compelling witness to non-Christians and the possibility of new membership of those for whom the current teaching has been a stumbling block. Members currently leaving the LCA over this issue could be retained.
4. People who currently feel alienated from the church because of its teaching to this point in time, could have that burden lifted, and could feel more included in the life of the church.
5. The church could gain a wider use of gifts in the pastorate. Women pastoral students and pastors could increase the diversity of gifts for service in the church. The LCA could gain a deeper sense of the diversity within the body of Christ.
6. New relationships with other churches. The LCA could be able to consider more formal relationships with other Lutheran churches who currently ordain women. In addition it could open new opportunities to support and learn from near neighbour Lutheran churches.

What would be lost?

1. For some, to call and ordain women to the pastoral office means that the authority of Christ and Scripture would be lost or at least called into question, and the blessing that comes from faithfulness would be lost. By ordaining women the LCA would be seen to ignore or disobey a command of the Lord in the Word of God (1 Cor 14:33b-38). The current teaching of the LCA does not conflict with the Gospel that there is forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. Confidence in the authority and clarity of Scripture as it has been understood in the LCA. To change the church's position on the ordination of women could mean changing the way Scripture has been read, understood and taught in the LCA. Such a change could permeate into other areas of church teaching.
3. The church's witness to the Lord and mission to the world is fostered by clear teaching that engages with the issues of the day from a biblical perspective. In the Great Commission Jesus directs the church to make disciples 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' (Matt 28:20). For some, to reject the Lord's command in 1 Corinthians 14:37 could hamper the church's witness to the Lord and its mission to the world, which at times needs to be counter-cultural.
4. There are currently members, pastors and church leaders who find great joy and peace in being faithful to Christ, the Gospel and the current public teaching of the LCA. To change that teaching, a teaching they committed themselves to as members and pastors of the church, could burden their conscience and disrupt the unity of the church.
5. The ability to bridge Lutheran relationships. Despite being a small church, the LCA, at least in part because of its current theological convictions, is, for the time being, in a position to be an effective bridge in wider Lutheran conversations.
6. Weakened/broken relationships with other churches. A decision to ordain women could seriously strain relations with some of our close theological friends.

Conclusion

While some of the gains and losses listed might be shared by people from across the range of perspectives mentioned, in the main, those who see Scripture as forbidding the ordination of women will see such a change in teaching mainly in terms of loss while those who see that Scripture allows for the ordination of women will see such a change in teaching mainly in terms of gain.