

AGENDA 6.1

Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations

MEMBERS

The main work of the CTICR is given to it either by general synod, district synods, the college of bishop, or pastors' conferences. The membership comprises the Bishop and Assistant Bishop of the Church (ex officio), five ordained members of the ALC faculty, three pastors, three lay people, and two bishops. The other district bishops are consultants along with the Secretary of the Church and the Principal of ALC. The executive this triennium has comprised Bishop John Henderson (ex officio), Pastor Fraser Pearce (extra member), Bishop Andrew Pfeiffer (vice chair), Rev Dr Peter Lockwood (secretary), and Rev Dr Jeff Silcock (chair).

ACHIEVEMENT AGAINST PLAN

The principal work of the CTICR this triennium has been the preparation of two documents requested by synod: (1) *A theological basis for the ordination of women and men: draft doctrinal statement*, and (2) *A theological basis for why the ordination of women and men need not be Church-divisive*. The CTICR was also asked 'to study the Lutheran theological and scriptural understanding of subordination and the role of male headship in marriage and the contextual implications for family violence'. This work was undertaken by a joint taskforce comprising three members of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) and three members of the Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions (CSBQ). The CTICR has also written two other documents for the guidance of the Church: (1) *A theological basis for the ordination of women and men: background to the draft doctrinal statement*, and (2) *Engaging with the draft doctrinal statement: reflection arising from the current teaching of the Church*. The latter document was produced on the advice of the College of Bishops based on of the feedback from the Churchwide consultations. Since these last two documents were not specifically requested by the synod, they form an appendix to this report rather than being part of the report proper.

In addition to producing the aforementioned documents, the CTICR has also begun to work on a short summary statement on the topic of ecology ('Faithful earthkeeping—embracing a God-given responsibility') which will serve to complement the larger study document that the commission completed last triennium titled: 'God's creation: a sacred responsibility'.

Another important task of the CTICR is to oversee the three ecumenical dialogues (Lutheran–Roman Catholic; Lutheran–Uniting and Anglican–Lutheran). The Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue recently produced a study document *The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation* (2016) as well as 'A Statement on the Occasion of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation' (2017). The Lutheran–Uniting Church dialogue has concluded the first phase of its final goal of working towards a Concordat of full communion between the LCA and the UCA. A progress report (titled 'At the Table') has been lodged with both churches and both churches have been asked to provide feedback and answer questions.

The CTICR is also represented at the twice-yearly meetings of the Faith and Unity Commission of the National Council of Church in Australia (NCCA). Our current representative is Rev Andrew Brook who took over from Rev Dr Michael Lockwood. We thank them both for their services.

SUCCESSSES

The outcome of the 33 LCA-wide consultations to consider the CTICR's initial draft doctrinal statement on the ordination on women and men was critical to the successful completion of the new draft doctrinal statement requested by the 2015 synodical convention, which now has the title: *A theological basis for the ordination of women and men: draft doctrinal*

statement. The consultations considered an earlier draft of this document as well as a preliminary draft of the other document requested by synod titled: *A theological basis for why the ordination of women and men need not be Church-divisive.*

The other significant outcome of the consultations is that, based on the feedback and the subsequent advice of the College of Bishops, the CTICR produced a statement that gives voice to the current teaching of the Church and allows it to engage with the draft doctrinal statement.

The successful organisation of the consultations must be credited to the efficiency, collegiality, and managerial skills of the project officer, Mr Timothy Pietsch, employed by the Office of Bishop. The commission is also grateful to Ms Judy Gilbertson, appointed by the CTICR, to collate the huge volume of feedback from the consultations which was enormously helpful in preparing the new draft doctrinal statement in particular.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

There are several challenges. First, there will be changes to the leadership of the commission next triennium with the retirement of the chair (Rev Dr Jeff Silcock) as well as the secretary (Rev Dr Peter Lockwood). Both these men have served the commission faithfully for a long period of time and have been appropriately thanked for their work. Their departure might be seen by some as a risk but they would rather see it, not even as a challenge, but as an opportunity for new blood to be introduced into key leadership positions.

Second, the work of the CTICR would be helped enormously by an administrative assistant. The commission has written a letter to the GCC requesting that favourable consideration be given to such an appointment. This admin support could be shared across the three commissions (theology, social and bioethical questions, and worship). The level of assistance required needs to go beyond that already available to the commission through the services of the LCA receptionist, who assists with email agendas and minutes and general filing of documents.

Third, the joint CTICR-CSBQ taskforce, which was appointed by the CTICR, to study the possible link between male headship in marriage and family violence has highlighted several issues that it believes the LCA needs to consider more deeply. Three are singled out here for special mention: (1) that the LCA could benefit from a program of training for all pastors and pastoral workers in how to recognise and respond pastorally to situations of domestic violence. (2) that the LCA could also benefit from further research into the practices around repentance and forgiveness involving domestic abusers, especially in view of the well-established cycle of abuse that so often continues even after there has been remorse on the abuser's part. (3) the taskforce proposes that it may be a useful witness against domestic violence, and also helpful for spiritual teaching, if the LCA developed a clear doctrinal and pastoral statement, renouncing violence of any kind in the home, and promoting the mutual Christ-like service of husband and wife in Christian marriage.

Finally, the domestic violence taskforce, comprising Mr Ian Rentsch, Mrs Vanessa Kohrt, Dr Tanya Wittwer, Mrs Helen Lockwood, Rev Dr Stephen Hultgren, and Rev Dr Stephen Pietsch (chair), was thanked by the full commission for its report on what was a difficult and highly controverted topic.

RISKS

Given the nature of the tasks given the CTICR by synod: (1) to draft a doctrinal statement for the ordination of men and women; and (2) to provide *a theological basis for why the ordination of women and men need not be Church-divisive*, it is understandable that the commission found itself wondering at times if it would actually be able to complete the tasks, since the opinions of commission members on this matter are as divergent as they are in the Church. So, the risk was due to deep differences of conviction which in the end are matters of

conscience. This risk can never be averted but it needs to be noted in the interests of transparency.

ALIGNMENT TO LCA STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2013–2018

The current strategic direction 2013–2018 makes no provision for the work of the Commission on Theology. If the study of scripture and theological research is foundational to the life of the LCA, as we say it is, and if the Church's engagement with current issues is to be biblically and confessionally grounded, then the CTICR makes the earnest plea that the LCA, when it develops its new strategic direction for the next five years, gives theology and the work of the Commission on Theology its rightful place so that when the LCA grapples with its future direction, the theological question is not overlooked but remains at the front and centre of the life of the Church.

COOPERATING LCA BOARDS AND AGENCIES

In order to deal with the third synodical resolution that was directed to the CTICR, namely, to study the possible link between the biblical teaching on male headship and female subordination in marriage, on the one hand, and family violence, on the other, it was decided to form a joint taskforce between the CTICR and CSBQ. The CTICR received and discussed the final report (titled: CTICR taskforce on domestic violence) and it is now before the convention of synod.

CTICR also thanks the LCA Communications Department (especially the executive manager, Ms Linda Macqueen) for assisting it (1) in the task of reformatting its core online document collection DSTO (*Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions*); (2) restructuring the CTICR webpages to make them more accessible; and (3) in reporting regularly, both via the OWL (Ordination We're Listening) website and in *The Lutheran*, on the LCA-wide ordination consultations during 2017.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The LCA provides a budget to cover the cost of travel and accommodation. It has already been mentioned under section E that the allocation of additional financial resources to the work of the Church's theology commission (CTICR) in the form of administrative assistance would lighten the load of the secretary and improve the commission's efficiency.