

People whose worldview is other than Christian within Australian Lutheran Aged and Community Care services¹

Purpose

The following paper does not constitute a theological position on people whose worldview is other than Christian², or on other religions, nor does it affect current Aged and Community Care policies. The purpose of this document is to help senior staff at Lutheran Aged Care and Community Care sites and their Aged and Community Care services to discuss these issues in their context.

Preamble

In our multicultural society, we work and live increasingly alongside those representing a variety of religious beliefs and faiths. As Aged and Community Care services of the Lutheran Church of Australia our gospel-oriented approach and commitment is a core aspect of our identity. Today, residents and staff members representing non-Christian religious traditions are in our Aged and Community Care services. This inevitably raises questions about the religious rights of these persons while among us as well as to our duties and duty of care toward them. Lutheran Aged and Community Care services seek to act respectfully and compassionately with regard to people of different faiths. The following guidelines do not constitute a theological position on other religions. They are rather guidelines for Lutheran Aged and Community Care services to follow in dealing in a consistent, responsible and compassionate manner with individuals of other religious faiths within our Lutheran Aged and Community Care services.

Key guiding principles

1. The Lutheran Aged and Community Care service serves both the church and the state as it carries out God's work of care in the world. God works through both the church ('right hand kingdom') and the secular order ('left hand kingdom') and the Christian lives and works within both [see Appendix A].
2. All Lutheran Aged and Community Care services serve God through the 'left hand kingdom' and recognise the right of the state to make regulations with regard to discrimination on the basis of religion and the rights of people of varying religious faith. The Lutheran Aged and Community Care service therefore seeks to observe and work within these regulations [see Appendix B].
3. As Aged and Community Care services of the Lutheran Church of Australia, our philosophy and practice, and our basis for service and caring is grounded in Lutheran theology. This theology has as its central focus the forgiveness of sins by the grace of God through which people are made right with God (justified) through faith given by the Holy Spirit. All of this is possible only because of the saving work of Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection. In response to this gift of grace, Christians recognise their responsibility to serve others as God in Christ has served them. One aspect of this is to deal with people of other faith communities within the Lutheran Aged and Community Care community as outlined in guiding principle four below.
4. Lutheran Aged and Community Care services seek to express the love of Christ by fostering

¹ This paper has been adapted from a Board for Lutheran Education Australia (BLEA) paper produced for Lutheran principals and councils. Permission has been granted by BLEA for the Committee for Ministry with the Ageing to adapt their paper.

² Hereafter referred to as 'non-Christian'

the gift of hospitality [Rom 12:13³], and by welcoming all people [Matt 25:35⁴]. This does not mean agreeing with everything each person believes or practises but it does mean respecting them within the Lutheran Aged and Community Care community, and treating them fairly and not as outsiders [see Appendix C].

Implementation guidelines

Lutheran Aged and Community Care will vary greatly in respect to the number of people of non-Christian faiths within their services. There may be a variety of religious faiths from which these individuals come - such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Orthodox Judaism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Islam, and Baha'i. They may come from sectarian groups - such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses - and from atheistic groups - such as Wiccan or various Satanist groups. All of these factors will have an impact of the implementation guidelines suggested below.

1. Staff members of non-Christian faiths

Lutheran Aged and Community Care may prefer hiring staff who are most closely in agreement with the foundational principles of Lutheran Aged and Community Care, however it is not always possible to find qualified Lutherans or even Christian staff for positions. There will inevitably be a need to hire staff with a non-Christian faith commitment, or no religious commitment at all. In making such appointments, Aged and Community Care HR/managers will need to explain clearly, what is expected of staff in respect to the Lutheran Aged and Community Care's religious beliefs and practices. Some staff may have apprehensions or fears about working within a Christian environment and the Aged and Community Care community should endeavour to make them feel welcome and to allow for any realistic religious sensibilities or practices of their faith as a part of the Aged and Community Care's own expression of Christian hospitality. All staff need to be fully integrated into the work of the organisation with no discrimination. Some positions, e.g. Chaplain within the Aged Care service, will require a Christian employee (as a *Genuine Occupational Requirement* or with a *Genuine Occupational Qualification*⁵).

2. Residents of other religious faiths

Residents who are adherents of other faiths should be welcomed into the community and involved in groups and other avenues of involvement provided they show respect for the Christian commitment of the Aged and Community Care service and do not use their involvement as a means to inappropriately promote their own faith tradition.

Evangelism in the Aged and Community Care community in relation to persons of other faith commitments

1. One of the motivating factors for the establishment and maintenance of Lutheran Aged and Community Care is that the love and light of Christ might be made known within our services. Christianity is by nature an evangelistic faith. That is to say, we believe that the

³ Rom 12:13 (GNT) 'Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers.'

⁴ Matt 25:35 (GNT) 'I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes.'

⁵ Various anti-discrimination acts allow discrimination on the grounds of religion under certain circumstances as it may be a *genuine occupational requirement* of the employer that the person, in the course of, or in connection with, the person's work, act in a way consistent with the employer's religious beliefs. See: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/employers/good-practice-good-business-factsheets/quick-guide-australian-discrimination-laws>

grace of God we experience through Christ is something that is not our exclusive possession but it is for all people as the Holy Spirit works faith in their lives. We believe that we should share our faith with others by our actions and our words.

2. In the case of persons of other faiths who are a part of our Aged and Community Care community, we hope they would see the power of the gospel of Christ through their journey with us. Because staff are in a unique relationship within the Aged and Community Care community in which they may feel their job is at stake, it is inappropriate to directly evangelise these persons, as they may feel beholden to the Aged and Community Care community, and forcing the question of faith commitment would put them in a very difficult situation.
3. Our Lutheran Aged and Community Care services will provide pastoral and spiritual nurture and worship, where appropriate, for the needs of the residents and staff. Our best witness should be our everyday words and actions.
4. In general, people of other faith traditions in our Aged and Community Care services, who experience our Christian welcome, will be more significantly and positively impacted by our gospel approach than if they were to be openly evangelised by our Aged and Community Care staff or other members of the Aged and Community Care community. Care needs to be taken so that we avoid situations where residents or staff feel they are not free to speak their mind or tell us they are not interested. Overt evangelism is not only inappropriate but is likely to achieve little beyond inoculating such persons against more appropriate opportunities to hear the gospel message.

Additional guidance on specific areas

For religions that practice prescribed acts of worship or have special holy days

1. Some religions have strictly prescribed worship regimes that mean staff will need time and appropriate space to fulfil their worship obligations, as long as it does not hinder their duty of care for the resident (see Appendix D). In most cases where very small numbers are involved, often some appropriate private space can be negotiated with the individual or individuals concerned through the Chaplain or management of the Aged and Community Care service. The Aged and Community Care service should be clear to all involved in the community that making such a space available is not an endorsement or support of a particular non-Christian religion - it is a simple act of hospitality that is a part of our own Christian religious obligation.
2. Where staff have prescribed holy days that they feel obliged to attend, they will need to arrange to take leave, as all staff do, for attending special personal events during work time.

For religions that practice prescribed religious dress

Sometimes issues will arise with regard to dress or jewellery of a religious nature. A distinction should be made between obligatory and optional religious dress and symbols. A Christian staff member may, for instance, choose to wear a cross necklace as a sign of their faith, however such symbolism is not required by their faith. The staff member will need to be made aware of the Aged and Community Care dress codes and the service's Work Health and Safety policy that may disallow such jewellery. Other examples are given in Appendix E.

For religions that practice prescribed religious symbols

The wearing of optional religious symbols by staff must meet ordinary Aged and

Community Care uniform codes. Clothing expressing a particular religious commitment or point of view may be disallowed by the Lutheran Aged and Community Care service.

Religious symbolism which is deemed anti-Christian or potentially offensive to Christians or other members of the community should be prohibited. This is not done as a form of religious discrimination, but to prevent the defamation of other religious points of view.

Residents who follow anti-Christian beliefs should not be prevented from expressing their views within the privacy of their own unit /room etc., or be discriminated against for these views, but the public wearing of clothing, buttons, jewellery, book covers or the like which contain deliberately provocative anti-Christian or anti-God expressions or symbols should be prohibited.

Use of Aged and Community Care facilities for other faith activities

In principle a non-Christian religious group may hire or, upon request or application, be given use of a building or area of a Lutheran Aged and Community Care facility. However, it would be within the rights of a Lutheran Aged and Community Care service to have a policy that they not hire or allow the use of such facilities to non-Christian religious groups on the basis of avoiding confusion in the community about the Aged and Community Care's religious identity and commitment. Any policy needs to be clearly stated in non-judgemental terms and applied consistently. In addition, distinction may well need to be made between non-Christian religious groups hiring facilities for religious and non-religious purposes.

APPENDIX A – Right and left hand kingdoms

Martin Luther made an important distinction between the kingdom of the right (the church) and the kingdom of the left (the secular order). Both are God's domain and the Christian lives and works within both. The rules and values held within the kingdom of the right (the church), however, cannot simply be assumed, transferred or applied to the kingdom of the left (the secular order) (Cf. Luther, *Temporal Authority. To What Extent it should be Obeyed*, LW 45). For Lutheran Christians it has always been clear that the state has the right to make decisions with regard to such matters as the rights of people of varying religious faith and concerning discrimination on the basis of religion. The Christian cannot and should not seek to escape the secular order. As Luther wrote: "We are all born into it before we become Christians. Therefore we must also remain within it so long as we live on the earth, but according to the external bodily life and existence" (Sermon on Mt 5:38-42, in WA 32:390.15-18). We respect the right of the state to make regulations in the area of non-discrimination on the basis of religion and, as responsible members of the kingdom of the left seek, to observe and work within these rulings.

APPENDIX B – Anti-discrimination law

Australian anti-discrimination laws prohibit discriminatory hiring practices and discrimination in the work place on the basis of a number of points, including race, religion, gender and sexual orientation. Anti-defamation laws also need to be taken into account in guiding us in how we speak publicly about religions other than our own. Because of the faith-based nature of Lutheran Aged and Community Care services, the question of religious commitment and views is relevant for many positions. However, in the case of some positions where the faith commitment is not as essential to the role, there is no basis in present law for not hiring a candidate on the basis of their religious faith. There is also no basis for not admitting a resident on the basis of their religion. This means the inevitably of people from non-Christian religious faith will be a part of our Lutheran Aged and Community Care services.

APPENDIX C – Welcoming all people

As part of the Christian community, Lutheran Aged and Community Care services seek to express the love of Christ by welcoming all people. There are strong and clear biblical foundations for being a welcoming community including a biblical welcoming the stranger tradition, ranging from the Old Testament injunction to Israel to welcome the stranger in her borders (Exodus 23:9, Leviticus 19:10, Deuteronomy 10:19, etc.) to the words of Jesus: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). The *Welcoming the Stranger* document released by the Lutheran World Federation exemplifies this spirit regarding how we welcome a stranger and how we welcome each other. The document declares:

A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger, the refugee, the internally displaced, the other. I shall treat him or her as I would like to be treated. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same.⁶

There will always be persons who for whatever reason are seen as or feel like outsiders within our services. This can be the case for those of different religious commitments, or no religious commitment at all. Lutheran Aged and Community Care services have a Christian obligation to make people of other religious faiths feel welcome in their community. Welcoming the stranger

⁶ https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming_the_Stranger.pdf

does not mean agreeing with everything they may believe or practise. It does mean respecting, treating fairly, not excluding and making welcome those who may for whatever reason be different from us.

APPENDIX D - Prescribed acts of worship

The Islamic faith is one example of a religion with prescribed worship practices. The devout Muslim is obliged to pray five times during the day. The prayers do not take long but staff, who follow the Islamic faith, will need a small quiet space where they have room to kneel (facing Mecca) and perform their prayers. The space can be used for other things at other times and does not need to be a dedicated prayer or meditation space. In the case of Muslims, most are flexible and are usually able to fit their prayer obligation in during regular breaks in the daily Aged and Community Care schedule but on rare occasions may need some flexibility with their work schedule to meet their devotional obligations.

APPENDIX E – Prescribed religious dress

The best-known situations where members of other faiths may have specific dress requirements are in the case of skullcaps or other head covering for Orthodox Jewish men, a turban for Sikh men and head coverings for Muslim women etc. In such cases, this should be incorporated into the Aged and Community Care uniform or staff dress code. This is common practice within Australian society and is another way of expressing hospitality and understanding.

Other Reference material that maybe helpful...

LCA Statement on School Worship

<http://www.lutheran.edu.au/publications-policies/policies-guidelines-2/>

The Lutheran Church of Australia and interfaith worship (DSTO 2, G4) - although the statement has been prepared for another context, its guiding principles may also be helpful:

<http://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/>

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct - jointly written by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world>