

General Pastors Conference Advice to General Synod 2015

PREAMBLE

The General Pastors Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia met from 7-9 July 2015 at St Michael's Church and School Hahndorf South Australia, in order to fulfil its duties to give guidance and to serve as a theological adviser to the General Synod in matters of doctrine and confession [LCA By-Laws V.F 1. (a) and 2.]. The business of the meeting was to consider the proposals referred to it by the General Church Council at its meeting of 5-6 June 2015 in preparation for the forthcoming General Convention of Synod to be held from 29 September – 4 October 2015.

In conducting its business the Conference was mindful of its responsibility to assist the Synod according to the 'Procedure in Transacting Business at a General Synod' [LCA By-Laws VII.C.28.(2)] which states *a matter deemed to be of a theological and confessional nature...shall be considered by the Convention only after a recommendation has been received from the General Pastors Conference.*

The guidance contained in this document represents the earnest and prayerful endeavour of the Conference to offer advice and recommendation to the General Synod in regard to the proposals referred to it on the matter of Women and the Call to the Office of the Public Ministry.

Please note: the text contained in boxes is the result of work done by the College of Bishops after the conclusion of the Conference, at the request of the Pastors in Conference.

ADVICE TO GENERAL SYNOD adopted by the General Pastors Conference on 9 July 2015

General Pastors Conference (GPC) has the task of advising the Synod on theological matters. General Church Council (GCC) referred sixteen (16) congregational proposals on the ordination matter, which it received for the forthcoming General Convention, to GPC for advice. At the recommendation of GCC, GPC considered the proposal from St Peters, Indooroopilly, representative of the fourteen (14) proposals to support the ordination of women, and the proposals from the Mid-Murray and the Grampians parishes in support of the Church's current teaching.

As pastors of the LCA we have all given confessional assent to the following:¹

- a) We believe and accept without reservation the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life.
- b) We acknowledge and accept as true expositions of the word of God and as our confession of faith all the symbolical writings of the evangelical Lutheran church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580.

We have also vowed to uphold the public teaching and practice of the Lutheran Church of Australia and to accept the pastoral and doctrinal oversight of our bishops.

From this common basis we engaged in a very positive and helpful process of dialogue and discussed the proposals in small groups. Everyone participated well, was able to contribute to discussions and there was a strong desire to focus on the Word of God and being able to advise the Church in good conscience. Feedback was collated and shared at a plenary forum where further discussion ensued.

¹ Text taken from the LCA's Rite of Ordination (Church Rites, Lutheran Church of Australia; Adelaide, Openbook Publishers, 1994).

Commentary

Our process included examining the Indooroopilly, Mid-Murray, and Grampians proposals for:

- clarity of Biblical and theological rationale;
- presentation of clear argument; and
- strength of case.

We also reflected on the effect of possible decisions of the 2015 General Convention in regard to this matter, on us individually as pastors of the LCA.

While traditionally we have mostly engaged in debate, speaking for and against formal proposals, this time we used a speaking-and-listening dialogue in small groups of three or four. In the full gathering we considered draft recommendations prepared overnight by a framing group. We valued this approach as it enabled each pastor to contribute.

In Theses of Agreement VI 'Theses on the Office of the Ministry', paragraph 11² prohibits the ordination of women on the basis of two key biblical texts. We were asked the following question with regard to our understanding of these texts. 251 participants gave these responses:

*After examination and discussion of the key biblical texts (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-14) which of the following best describes your present view concerning these texts:*³

- The texts clearly do not allow for, the ordination of women:*
Affirming 31%
- The texts are not entirely clear, but would seem to not allow for the ordination of women:*
Affirming 23%
- The texts are not entirely clear, but would seem to allow for the ordination of women:*
Affirming 24%
- There is nothing in these texts that would exclude the ordination of women:*
Affirming 21%

These figures are a snapshot of our response to the above question. They are not necessarily indicative of how pastors might vote on the proposals that have been submitted to the General Synod. We discovered a continuing lack of consensus on the matter of the ordination of women; however we were able to agree on the following advice:

- 1) After considering the proposals, GPC advises that the St Peters, Indooroopilly, proposal be used as the basis for dialogue and debate on this matter at Synod, even though this proposal is not endorsed by GPC.
- 2) GPC believes that in discussing this proposal Synod will need to take into account the reasons and rationale for the proposal with reference to the documents cited at 13. i-vii⁴ in the proposal, and the reasons and rationale for the current teaching of the Church as outlined in the following documents:
 - a. A case for the ordination of men only (2005)

² Theses of Agreement VI.11. *Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired.*

³ We uphold our confession that God's Word is clear. However, those of us who affirmed the statements in b) and c) are not entirely clear about the meaning of these texts.

⁴ The Ordination Of Women CTICR 1991; CTICR Final Report on the Ordination of Women (2000); Hermeneutics and the ordination of women (2005); A case for the ordination of women and men (2005); 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 permit the ordination of women (2005); Galatians 3:26-29 and the ordination of women (2005); The case for the ordination of women – a summary (2006).

- b. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit the ordination of women (2005)
- c. Why does the LCA ordain men only? – a summary (2006).

It should be noted that four of the documents cited at 13 (i, ii, iii, & vi) contain both sides of the argument. All these documents can be found under resources on the OWL website owl.lca.org.au.

We also advise that the following topics raised by pastors need continued attention in the church:

- 1) A need to clarify and deepen the biblical and theological foundation of all proposals
- 2) The ongoing question of hermeneutics - how we understand and interpret Scripture.
- 3) The parameters of unity and diversity in the church - How much diversity is possible within our Church while still preserving our unity.
- 4) The appropriate use of Law and Gospel – How God’s grace and promises, and his commands and judgements, apply to us.
- 5) The pastoral implications for the church and its pastorate of either maintaining or changing the present teaching on the ordination of women.

In our healthy debate of this matter our priority remains the joyful proclamation of the gospel. We also recognise the need for ongoing pastoral care for God’s people.

*Adopted by General Pastors Conference
Thursday 9 July 2015*

A CALL TO PRAYER

We commit this matter to the Church for prayer, humbly seeking the wisdom of our Lord.

Heavenly Father thank you for your church into which you have graciously called us.

Thank you for your Word through which you reveal your will and work in this world.

As we look forward to and plan for our General Convention of Synod, give our delegates wisdom, guidance and patience. Open our hearts to your leading so that we may speak and act in ways that will honour your name.

Continue to give us unity as we consider the business before us, especially the matter of Women and the Call to the Office of the Public Ministry.

Focus our attention on you and empower us with your Holy Spirit so that we continue to bring the joy of your salvation to our communities and your love to life in our world.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

July 2015