



We're listening
to God



We're listening
to the church



We're listening to scripture



We're
listening
to each
other

ORDINATION

We're listening.

DIALOGUE HANDBOOK



LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF AUSTRALIA

where love comes to life

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HOW TO PLAN A LOCAL DIALOGUE

Since the release of the *Ordination. We're Listening* materials earlier this year, some of you have been asking for a basic guide to running a dialogue session with the people of your congregation or ministry.

This guide is based on the work of the LCA's Ordination Dialogue Group.

Getting ready for dialogue

- Ideally allow for a gathering of around 2-2½ hours, and provide some refreshments along the way. If that is too long and you need two or three shorter periods, allow some time at the beginning of the second gathering to recap what happened the first time, and re-present the **5 First Principles of Dialogue**. This is particularly important for those who were not at the first session.
- Before the scheduled date, encourage people to read the **LCA's Thesis of Agreement VI**, on the Office of the Ministry, particularly Article VI,11, and the Bible texts it quotes (page 8). It is usually helpful to make printed copies available to those intending to take part in the dialogue.
- Ask people to pray. Check out the **Prayer and Devotion Resources** from the *Ordination. We're Listening* website (reproduced on page 18).
- In advertising the dialogue, please remember that the purpose is not to force a single position on whether the church can call women to the Office of the Public Ministry. The purpose of this dialogue is to allow participants the confidence to speak and feel heard, express their views respectfully and without fear, and carefully listen to one another. It is important that all feel welcome in the family of God that is the church, in Jesus' name. In the LCA, the Convention of Synod will have the responsibility of determining the practice of the church in this matter.

Before you start the dialogue

- The leader should organise the participants into groups no larger than three to four, using his/her judgement to ensure that people of differing positions are included in each small group.

SESSION ONE

Your story

- Welcome everyone, and conduct a brief devotion, perhaps using the **Prayer and Devotion Resources** (page 18). Keep it simple, prayerful, and short.
- Introduce the **5 First Principles of Dialogue** (page 12).
- Introduce the first dialogue session as an opportunity for each person to describe their own journey with the issue of women and the public ministry.
- Questions to consider for reflection are:
 - When did you first hear about the ordination of women?
 - What was your initial reaction?
 - Have you changed or modified your view over time?
 - Who/what influenced you along the way?
 - What fears do you have in relation to this topic?

It is a good idea to have these questions available for distribution to all participants. This also applies to the questions for Sessions Two and Three.

- As an icebreaker, the leader might like to share his/her story, encouraging others to be open and honest as they grapple with the issue on a personal level.
- A key is not to try to make persuasive arguments, but just be frank about how you have journeyed with the issue.
- Break into groups, as described above. After this is finished, reconvene in order to debrief. The leader should moderate the debrief session.

SESSION TWO

The LCA's story

The LCA also has a story regarding women and the public ministry, a crucial part of which is our public teaching. This is articulated in Thesis of Agreement VI, 11.

- The leader should introduce the Theses of Agreement, especially VI,11. If necessary, a local pastor can help with this. Participants should have already had a chance to read Thesis VI. Have some photocopies available for distribution.
- Use the same method as in Session One. Questions to consider this time are:
 - With this document in mind, what is the LCA's public teaching on the Office of the Public Ministry?
 - What role does the Office of the Public Ministry play in the life of the church? Is the office important?
 - How would you explain the LCA's prohibition on women in the Office of the Public Ministry to another person (Christian or non-Christian)?
 - Is the ordination of women important? Why/Why not?
- Break into the same small groups, for a shorter time, to digest the LCA story re-convening again to debrief.

SESSION THREE

God's story

The final session focuses on the text of Scripture itself.

- The leader could highlight our irrevocable commitment to Scripture as God's Word, with reference to LCA public teaching (see, for example, **Article II of the LCA's Constitution**, the unalterable clauses (page 7).
- In preparation, the group should read the whole of 1 Corinthians 14¹ (page 10) and discuss how participants understand God speaking, for example in:
 - 14:6-19 – speaking in tongues and prophecy
 - 14:26-33 – keeping order in worship
 - 14:37-40 – recognising the command of the Lord.
- In particular, however, small groups should focus their dialogue on the Bible verses specifically referred to in TA VI, 11, listening to God's Word, and how he speaks into our personal and LCA stories. Each group could discuss whether God addresses this command to directly us, or means it for a limited pastoral and historical situation:

1 Cor. 14:34,35 – ... *women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*

1 Tim. 2:11-14 – *Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹² I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.*

- After the small groups have read the Scriptures together for a while, participants should be encouraged to pray for each other and for people who may be confused or hurting. You can also pray for the collective and godly wisdom of the LCA Synod as it once again approaches this matter at the 2015 Convention.

WRAP UP

The leader could reconvene the group for a final debrief, perhaps guided by the following questions:

- What has this dialogue session meant to you?
- What does this dialogue mean for the church?
- What are you going to take home from this dialogue?

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¹ 1 Corinthians 14 tends to be the major text. The group could also read the whole of 1 Timothy 2, reflecting on the instruction of verses 8-11.

RESOURCES

CONSTITUTION LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

An Association incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act, 1956-1965 of the State of South Australia.

ARTICLE II. CONFESSION

1. The Church accepts 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.
2. The Church acknowledges and accepts as true expositions of the Word of God and as its own confession all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, namely, the three Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed; the Unaltered Augsburg Confession; the Apology of the Augsburg Confession; the Smalcald Articles; the Small Catechism of Luther; the Large Catechism of Luther; and the Formula of Concord.

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

VI THESES ON THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY

On the basis of theses drawn up by Prof. Blaess and Dr Hebart after discussions by the Sub-Committees, the doctrine of the Office of the Ministry was discussed at Joint Meetings held on April 13 and May 4, 1950, and adopted in the following form at the Joint Meetings on May 4 and May 25, 1950.

**Reviewed July 2001, unedited*

1. The New Testament ministry is the office instituted by Christ for the public administration of the means of grace, that is, the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the Sacraments, through which as through instruments the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the hearts of men. Matt. 10; Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 9:1.2; 1 Cor. 3:5-7; 2 Cor. 3:5-8; Augsburg Confession V; Form. Conc.. Sol. Decl. XI. 29.
2. The office of the ministry is therefore an office instituted not by man, but by God. 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 4:11; Acts 20:28; Apology XIII. 11.
3. Since it is Christ's will that His Gospel be preached and the Sacraments administered, and since the use of the means of grace is essential to the existence of the Church on earth, and since according to the Lord's promise the Church on earth is to remain until the end of time, Matt. 16: 18, the office of the ministry is an office, which is simultaneous with the Church and to which the Church is bound from its beginning to the end of time. Matt. 28: 18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Rom. 10:8-17; 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 16:25,26; Augsburg Confession XXVIII, 8-10, 20,21.
4. Though the power to remit or retain sin, to make known the Law and the Gospel, was originally and immediately given by the Lord of the Church to all Christians, that is, to the whole Church and also to the individual congregation, and though all believers are a spiritual priesthood, yet the office of the ministry is not identical with the spiritual priesthood of all believers in Christ. But there is a vital connection between the two inasmuch as the ministry by the institution of the Lord necessarily exists within the Church which is the royal priesthood and the People of God. Matt. 16: 15-19; Matt. 18: 15-20; I Peter 2:9; John 20:19-23; Luke 24:33-36; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 1 Cor. 12:28,29; Rom. 10:15; Smalc. Art., Tract. 24, 67-69.
5. The office of the ministry is essentially an office of service to the Lord and His Church with the Word and the Sacraments, which office the ministers of the Church must exercise in obedience to their Lord and the directions given in the Word. Therefore, the office of the ministry does not give to those who bear it, arbitrary power over Christians, nor does it deliver the ministers of the Word up to the arbitrary directions and commands of men. Likewise, it is not a Levitical priesthood of the New Testament (Apol. XIII, 7-11; XXIV.58.59); nor are those who bear it an exclusive class distinct from Christians generally; nor do they possess a peculiar sanctity or an indelible character; nor does the ministry possess the power of self-perpetuation. Matt.23:8-12; 1 Cor- 3:5; 4:1,2; 2 Cor. 4:5; Col. 1:23-25; I Peter 5: 1-3; Matt.20:25-28; Apol. XXVIII, 13,14; XXII, 9; XXIV, 86 (German and English text re Liturgia); Smalc. Art., Pars 11, IV, 9; Form. Conc., Sol. Decl. XII, 30; XI. 29.

6. According to the New Testament the spiritual functions of the Apostolate are continued only in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Acts 6:1-4; Acts 1:23; Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 3:1ff; 5:17; Titus 1:5ff; 1 Peter 5:1; Heb. 13:17; ApoL XV, .2 (.): Smalc. Art. Tractatus: 10. 13.15.60-65; Smalc. Art., Pars 11, IV, 9; Form. Conc., Sol. Decl X, 10.
7. No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacrament unless he be regularly called. (C.A. XIV). The Lord calls individuals into the office of the ministry through the Christian congregations. Acts 13:1-4. and the Christian congregation, either alone or together with other congregations, or through properly appointed representatives, calls qualified persons (1 Tim. 3:1.7; Titus 1:6-9; 2 Tim. 2:24.25; Acts 1:241 into the office of the ministry publicly to exercise the functions of this office. The minister of the Word is thus called by the Lord through His Church, and by the Church as through human agency and authority, but in obedience to the command of the Lord. He is therefore the servant of the Lord Jesus, a minister of the New Testament, a steward of the mysteries of God, called to serve by publicly administering the means of grace. 2 Cor. 4:5; Rom. 10:15; 2 Cor. 5:18; 1. Thess.5:12.13; Augsburg Confession XIV: Apol. VII. 28 (end of paragraph); Smalc. Act. Tractatus: 14.15.24. 26. 67.69.
8. Ordination, though not a Sacrament, is the solemn ecclesiastical rite in which a duly qualified person (1 Tim.3:2-7: Titus 1:5-9), having accepted a call by a congregation or the Church, is received by the Church as a gift from the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4: 11: Titus 1:5) and publicly declared to be a minister of the New Testament, his call thereby being ratified and publicly acknowledged, and the blessing of the Lord is invoked upon him with the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is an old and biblical rite, but it has no divine command and is not essential for the validity and efficacy of the office. Acts 6:6; 8:17: 13:3; 1 Tim. 5:22; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6: Num. 27:18; Smalc. Art. Tractatus 70.
9. Although the office of the ministry is the only office ordained by Christ for His Church of the New Testament, yet the Christian congregation has the authority to establish auxiliary offices (elders, deacons, teachers, Sunday-school teachers and superintendents, trustees, wardens, etc.) after the example of the apostles and the early Christian Church (e.g., diaconate). Acts 6:6; Rom. 16:1.
10. Similarly the Church at large has the liberty and authority from Christ to establish various ecclesiastical and administrative offices for the common prosecution of various undertakings in obedience to the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations. 1 Cor. 12:4-13, 26-28; Acts 11:21-23. This necessitates proper guidance and direction, spiritual and otherwise, 1 Cor. 14:40; 2 Cor. 8:18-21; 9:5, because the Lord has commanded that everything be done decently and in order and in accordance with the law of love. Such arrangements may vary according to time and circumstances. All external arrangements in congregations and in church bodies and all ranking of the ministers are purely of human right and the efficacy of the ministry of the Gospel is not bound to any human institution. Matt.23:8; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Augsburg Confession XV; XXVIII, 5-29; Smalc. Art. Tractatus: 10, 11, 61-65.
11. Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament. 1 Cor.14:34,35 and 1 Tim. 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.

1 CORINTHIANS 14 (NRSV)

Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. ²For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. ³On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation. ⁴Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. ⁵Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷It is the same way with lifeless instruments that produce sound, such as the flute or the harp. If they do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played? ⁸And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰There are doubtless many different kinds of sounds in the world, and nothing is without sound. ¹¹If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹²So with yourselves; since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for building up the church.

¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive. ¹⁵What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise, if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since the outsider does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you may give thanks well enough, but the other person is not built up. ¹⁸I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; ¹⁹nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults. ²¹In the law it is written,

‘By people of strange tongues
and by the lips of foreigners
I will speak to this people;
yet even then they will not listen to me,’

says the Lord. ²²Tongues, then, are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

²⁴But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. ²⁵After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, 'God is really among you.'

²⁶ What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. ²⁸But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God.

²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. ³²And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, ³³for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. ³⁵If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

³⁷ Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. ³⁸Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. ³⁹So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; ⁴⁰but all things should be done decently and in order.

FIVE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGUE

Introduction

The Lutheran Church of Australia's (LCA) Ordination Dialogue Group was called together by the President of the Church in 2011. This was an outcome of the 2009 LCA National Convention of Synod which asked for a more consensus based approach after 20 or more years of debate on the Scriptural arguments for and against ordaining women.

The 2013 Synod received a brief report from the Dialogue Group and encouraged it to continue its work. Since then the Group, consisting of 5 pastors not previously involved in the public debate, has been exploring ways to make its work more accessible to the wider church. This is in line with its task to assist the LCA in coming to consensus.

Therefore the members of the group have reflected together on what they have learned so far about the process of dialogue and the issue of consensus. They offer the church these first five principles of dialogue as part of the fruit of that discussion, to be made available through *Ordination: We're listening* on the LCA website.

Five principles of dialogue in the LCA

1. Communion: Because God has gathered us in communion with one another through his word and sacraments, we have freedom to dialogue with one another on contested matters. Strengthening this God-given communion is the goal of dialogue.
2. Trust: Because God has made us brothers and sisters in Christ, we can trust God to use our communion to build us up in love and use our differences to grow us in holiness of life.
3. Listening: Because God gives each of his children a unique perspective, we can listen to each other trusting God that as we listen we will grow in understanding of ourselves, of the other person, and of the communion that God creates.
4. Speaking: Because God gives each of his children a unique perspective, we can speak to each other trusting God that as we speak we will grow in understanding of ourselves, of the other person, and of the communion that God creates.
5. Patience: Because the communion God gives us in Christ is God's doing and not ours, we can be patient in listening and speaking to each other, trusting that God will deepen the unity he has already given us.

LCA Ordination Dialogue Group
September 2013

CARING FOR EACH OTHER

Pastoral guidelines on mutual respect

The following guidelines are offered as an aid to members of the LCA as we again engage in dialogue on the question of the ordination of women.

They address that attitude among us which will create and maintain the best possible climate for full and open dialogue.

They do not present rules to be followed or a theological position to be adhered to. They are pastoral care intended to promote genuine mutual respect and care for each other.

Some will be unfamiliar with the nature of these guidelines, and may fail to understand their purpose. If we engage with them patiently, however, they will assist us conduct ourselves with the spirit of Christ, and in engage in a deep, rich, and meaningful dialogue. In the process we will learn about our self, each other, and our church.

They are offered, therefore, in a spirit of goodwill as a resource and help to the members of the LCA at this time.

The guidelines

As we dialogue with each other on the question of the ordination of women, we shall endeavour to embrace the following principles as our guide in this process:

- We will constantly remind ourselves that we are brothers and sisters in the family of God.
- We will view the issue before us, not as a battle to be won or lost, but as a shared family challenge. Though it might place us on opposite sides of the same question, as we face the challenge we will engage in constructive dialogue with each other and resist the adversarial approach which can too easily mar our conversations and our relationships.
- We will ask the Holy Spirit to imprint on our hearts God's call to love one another as God in Jesus has loved us.
- We will seek to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he had all power, did not consider that power something to be hung on to, but emptied himself of it, and became one of us, even to the point of death.
- We will honour the principle that, though we disagree – even vehemently – with what someone else in the family believes or says, we nevertheless defend – equally vehemently – their right so to believe and speak.

- Though we may be perplexed by the fact that theologians of equal calibre and background can deduce opposite views on the same question, we will respect the theological proficiency and integrity of each, confident that God's Spirit will maintain our unity in the midst of our diversity. In that confidence, we will see each other not so much as people who are right or wrong, but as people with different viewpoints, and we will respect the difference.
- We will be open to the possibility that this question is not as black and white as some may think, and that the shades of grey which have developed reflect the reality of God's gracious and timeless Word as a living message for the world in which and for which Christ died.
- We will at all times ensure that each person engaged in this debate is, and feels, safe, and will therefore refrain from all attempts to harangue or coerce another into a particular belief about this issue. We will never make this matter a question of someone's eternal salvation.
- We will do all in our power to find a solution which honours Scripture and all who to whom the solution deeply matters.²
- We will be honest and truthful with each other, and will enact this in loving, considerate ways. We will choose to talk to each other rather than about each other. And where we fail in this, we will seek forgiveness of each other and of God.
- We will practice patience, forbearing with one another.
- We will acknowledge that this question is not simply a matter of the head (what we think), but also of the heart (how we feel). We will therefore be sensitive to the pain of others in the community, whoever they are, and however that pain is expressed, and we will reach out to them with authentic words of healing and gracious actions of solidarity. We are in this together.
- We will practice putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, and will not patronise or belittle each other, but will treat each other with dignity at all times
- We will learn the wisdom of knowing when to stop.
- We will be real about the possibility that what we claim to be theological and/or biblical reasoning may not always be so, but may instead be a personal prejudice, quirk, or trait.
- Those of us who are leaders will model servant leadership to the community, willingly accepting the greater responsibility of the love we all have for our church as we continue to wrestle with this issue.

² By way of example: We could consider the possibility that the original question – 'Shall we ordain women?' – may no longer be the question to ask. Synod has not been able to give majority affirmation to that question. Equally, Synod would not be able to give majority affirmation to the question – 'Shall we ordain only men?' Given that reality, does the question become something like 'How does a church with completely opposite theological and biblical convictions on the same issue honour the integrity of all members of the church?' And there are surely other possibilities.

- We will pray for each other and for the community, not that others will be converted to our point of view, but that they will be shaped, sustained and blessed in their faith and in their lives.
- Above all, we will remember that the Christian community is the creation of the Spirit of Christ, and we will therefore entrust ourselves to the guidance of God's Spirit, confident that as we do so God will make known to us that which best serves Jesus' ministry through us for the world.

A PRAYER

Lord God,

as you have spoken to us in the past,
especially in the person of your Son,
so we seek to hear your voice for us today.
Speak to us in our helplessness,
that we may know the sustaining power of your wisdom.
Speak to us in our confusion,
that we may know the wonder of finding creative solutions to difficult questions.
Speak to us in our brokenness,
that together we may know the healing embrace of your love.
Speak to us in our division,
that we may know the reality of that oneness which is already ours,
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
Amen.

RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE: A PERSONAL CHECKLIST

*Reflections for those who participate*³

1. Am I willing to engage in respectful discussion with those with a different opinion from me, instead of wanting to impose upon them my point of view? Am I able to do this?
2. In my heart, do I regard those who disagree with me on this topic as my brothers and sisters in God's family, brought together by His grace? Do I truly love them as Christ loves me?
3. Am I willing to consider this issue from the point of view of the person with whom I disagree?
4. Do I genuinely believe that, though I disagree with another person, I will nevertheless defend their right to believe what they do as fellow believers who live in the grace of God?
5. Am I able to view other people's opinions on this issue, not as right or wrong in relation to mine, but simply different from mine, as we explore God's Word together?
6. Am I willing for my heart touched by the pain people experience around this question?
7. Am I genuinely able to reach out to a hurting person who has a different belief from me, and offer them care and support?
8. Am I aware of my capacity to inflict hurt on another person, and my capacity to make them feel unsafe? Do I have sufficient personal checks within me to ensure this does not happen – and to redress it if it does?
9. 'I do not consider that a person who believes differently from me on this question is in danger of divine condemnation.' Is this true for me?
10. Do I recognise that my beliefs are formed and influenced not only by my understanding of scripture, theology, and church, but also by my personality, prejudices, and life experiences?
11. Do I pray for those who believe differently from me on this issue – not that they will be converted to my viewpoint, but that they and I will be blessed as we work together on it?
12. Do I want to see our church reach a God-pleasing decision which respects the integrity and faith of all those who are engaged in this debate?

³ These personal reflections are provided to help us engage with open and caring hearts so that each participant can feel confident in saying what he/she thinks without suppressing it because of an unhealthy fear of confrontation or personal attack. A personal attitude that others see as caring and considerate strengthens our joint resolve to seek a common understanding on the issue before us. This checklist is not intended to replace honest discussion on the Scriptural truth or otherwise of individual points of view.

Reflections after a dialogue session

13. What have I learned today? (...about, for example, beliefs, other people, myself, etc.)
14. How have I listened today, and how well have I heard:
with my attitude?
with my heart?
with my ears?
with my mouth?
15. Do I feel that I have been listened to, and heard?
16. What could I do better next time?

Reflections for those who are theologians

17. Do I respect the theological ability of those with whom I disagree, rather than regard them as people who are theologically and biblically inferior to me?

Reflections for those who are leaders

18. Am I aware of my God-given responsibility to model Christ's love in all circumstances?
19. Have I addressed my own tendency to want to be right and to diminish others who do not agree with me?
20. Am I sensitive to the potential I have been given to heal and not to harm?
21. Am I willing to have my own fears and prejudices on this matter uncovered and confronted (addressed)?

PRAYER AND DEVOTION RESOURCES FOR STUDY SESSIONS

Introduction and explanation of these resources

These prayer and devotion resources were compiled in the late 20th century by the LCA Department of Liturgics, a unit of the Commission on Worship. The resources are a response to the 1997 LCA General Convention which called for prayer and devotional resources to support the study of the ordination of women in the LCA.

For God's guidance, love, and humility

- Dear Lord, thank you for the promise of your presence in all the turmoil and struggles that recur in our lives. Just as the Israelites were not spared the wilderness wanderings and just as the early Christians suffered so much for their faith in you, neither are we protected from today's social upheavals. Lead us, sustain us, and encourage us. Bless us in our quiet times as we meditate on your life-giving Word, and give us your wisdom and grace in all we undertake. Amen.
- Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, according to your bountiful grace, and support us with your continual help, so that in all our works begun, continued and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- God, you make all things work together for good to those who love you: Pour into our hearts such love toward you, that the pure desires which have been stirred up in us by your Spirit may not be spoiled by any temptation; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
- Lord, you have taught us that, without love, all our doings are worthless. Send us your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts the gift of love. Help us not to envy, boast, be proud, rude, or self-seeking, be easily angered, remember wrongs, or delight in evil. Help us, rather, to be patient and kind, to rejoice with the truth, to bear, trust, hope, and endure all things. When we fall, raise and restore us by your love in Jesus Christ, in whose most holy name we pray. Amen.
- Father in heaven, you resist the proud and give grace to the humble. Grant us true humility like that which was revealed in your Son, that we may never become puffed up and provoke your wrath, but in all lowliness be made to share in the fruit of your Spirit, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For the specific issue

- Heavenly Father, you inspired the writers of the Scriptures so that your word would come to us. Thank you for the opportunity to study your word and the important issue of the ordination of women. Bless our study. Make us ready to listen attentively, think clearly, speak carefully, and to discern your will for our church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- Lord, Holy Spirit, you have guided and protected the church in every age. As we now study the question of the ordination of women, direct our discussions and show us God's will. Help us be courteous and kind to one another, even if we disagree. Give us the strength to resist all temptations to dominate or desert, to control or coerce, but rather guide us and the whole church into the truth in a spirit of love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- Almighty and everlasting God, you want all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth. Grant us your Holy Spirit, so that as we consider and debate various aspects of the Office of the holy Ministry, we may not be a cause of offence to the unbelieving world by our disagreement with each other. Give us love for you and your word which shows itself in love for one another, so that the world may believe in your Son. We pray through Him whom you sent to the world, full of grace and truth, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.
- Lord God heavenly Father, through your living, Spirit-filled word you guide your people into all truth and bring glory to your Son. Send us your Spirit of truth, that He may guide our presidents, pastors, theologians, teachers, and all your people as they consider and debate the issue of the ordination of women to the Office of the holy Ministry. Give us hearts and minds which are devoted to you. Help us to come to agreement on the basis of your word. Give us that unity of purpose which brings glory to you. We pray through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

For peace

- Lord God, from whom all holy desires, all good purposes, and all right works proceed: Give to your servants that peace which the world cannot give. Defend us from the fear of our enemies, and set our hearts to obey your commandments, so that we may live on earth in rest and quietness. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

MEDITATION IDEAS FOR STUDY SESSIONS

Devotional action

- Use 'Responsive Prayer' (Morning or Evening) from LHS p.55 & 56 as a framework, adding appropriate readings, hymns and collects I brief prayers (see attached).
- Use devotional action to support unity in Christ:
 - use a crucifix and candles as the focal point;
 - begin with the Invocation;
 - stand in a circle, perhaps holding hands, for prayer;
 - invite sentence prayers from participants;
 - share the Peace
 - close with the Lord's Prayer said together and benediction.

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Read: Colossians 3:1-14

(Perhaps read from a paraphrase, such as Eugene Peterson's 'The Message')

Thoughts for reflection: looking at the big picture, rather than my own little world
putting on Christ's eyes, seeing things from his perspective the
Christ-like characteristics we pray for

LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST

Read: Colossians 3:15-17

(Perhaps read from a paraphrase, such as Eugene Peterson's 'The Message')

Thoughts for reflection: how to keep in tune with each other the discipline of community for a
Christian what it means to live and think and study in the name of Jesus
the discipline of praise and thankfulness

Read: Romans 12:1-21

Thoughts for reflection: individualism versus community different but equally wonderful gifts in
service of the body cultivating humility, encouragement, service in the
body rather than power

THE ART OF LISTENING

Read: Proverbs 18:13,15

Luke 10:38-42

Matthew 11:15 ('If anyone has ears to hear, let them listen!')

Thoughts for reflection: the need to listen our impulse is to talk about ourselves - our agendas are dominant listening firstly to our Master real listening to others is walking in their shoes being open to listen and learn

LIVING AT PEACE

Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Thoughts for reflection: the effect of the current discussion of women's ordination on peace in the church/congregation peace at the same time as disagreement

SHARE THE PEACE

Close by reading Philippians 4:7 (The peace of God, which passes all understanding ...)

A PSALM IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Praise God, all Christians in Australia

Thank the Lord for our Church and its wonderful gifts of grace
which our loving God has showered on us.

The Lord never ceases in giving to his people in the Word,
in the Sacred Meal,

in the ongoing joy of belonging that is God's baptismal blessing.

In the rush of everyday life, do we too easily forget these gifts?

Do we allow our daily cares to swallow up our joy in God's salvation?

Do we let our fear, resentment and anger towards our brothers
and sisters in Christ undermine the fellowship of our Church?

Forgive us Lord, for our failure to put our trust in you.

Forgive us Lord, for looking backwards instead of facing today
and tomorrow with confidence and hope in you alone.

Guide us, sustain us, and free us so that we might share your message
of new life with all Australians –

All who are living and dying without the hope that is found only in Jesus.

NOTES

NOTES



We're listening
to God



We're listening
to the church



We're listening to scripture



We're
listening
to each
other