



# HOW TO PLAN A LOCAL DIALOGUE

Since the initial 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.
  + [Click here](https://lca.app.box.com/files/0/f/119432419/1/f_954612121) to download it. You can also find the text of the Thesis of Agreement VI on the LCA website, [www.lca.org.au](http://www.lca.org.au)
    - Hover your cursor over **RESOURCES** in the top bar
    - Click on **LCA FOUNDATIONAL DOCUMENTS** (6th item down the list)
    - Scroll down to **Theses of Agreement**
    - Click on **Office of the Ministry**
    - Open the document with Adobe Reader or Adobe Acrobat

Alternatively, you can use the link in the Resources section of the [‘Ordination. We’re Listening’ website](http://owl.lca.org.au/?page_id=47)

* + 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 resources on the [‘Ordination. We’re Listening’ website](http://owl.lca.org.au/?cat=4)

* 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. Again, there are some ideas for this on the OWL website under ‘Praying’. Keep it simple, prayerful, and short.
* Introduce the **5 First Principles of Dialogue**. Our LCA team has prepared these principles and you can locate them on the OWL website under ‘Engaging’.
* Introduce the first dialogue session as an opportunity for each person to describe their own journey with the issue of women’s ordination. 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 with women’s ordination, 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, available at [www.lca.org.au/lca-foundational-documents.html](http://www.lca.org.au/lca-foundational-documents.html)
  + In preparation, the group should read the whole of 1 Corinthians 14[[1]](#footnote-1),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 [[2]](#footnote-2)
  + 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. 12I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. 13For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15Yet 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?

September 2014

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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The group could also reflect on other texts such as 1 Corinthians 11:3-22, Galatians 3:28, and John 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)