

Ministry Structure in the LCA

Structuring ourselves for growth in the 21st century

Introduction

Jesus said: 'I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it' (Matthew 16:18).

This promise was made by Jesus in relation to his church (of which there is only one). The church of Christ will stand the test of time because Jesus is the eternal Lord of his church.

No such promise was made specifically to the Lutheran Church of Australia. In its current form our LCA has been in existence since union in 1966. There is no way of knowing how long we will continue to exist as the same entity into the future.

‘Our role is not to ensure the survival of the LCA’

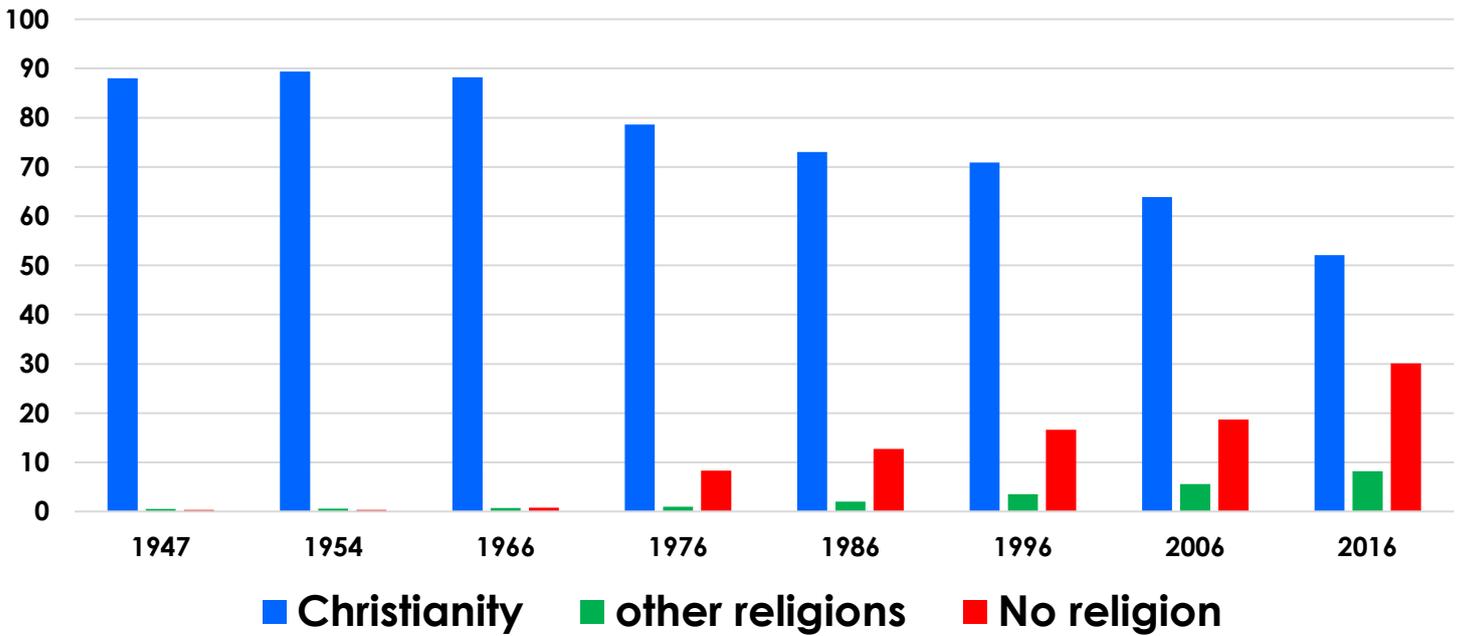
We are to discern God’s will for us as a denomination at this time and faithfully serve in his eternal kingdom according to the grace and calling we have received. In order to do that it is helpful to reflect on the landscape we find ourselves in, as Christians generally and as a Lutheran Church specifically.

Religious affiliation in Australia

The religious landscape in Australia remained consistent for 180 years: from European settlement in the late 18th century through to the late 1960’s. In the last 50 years, within a generation, it has changed rapidly. The decline experienced in the LCA is symptomatic of the decline experienced in Christianity generally.

This is depicted in the graph over the page.

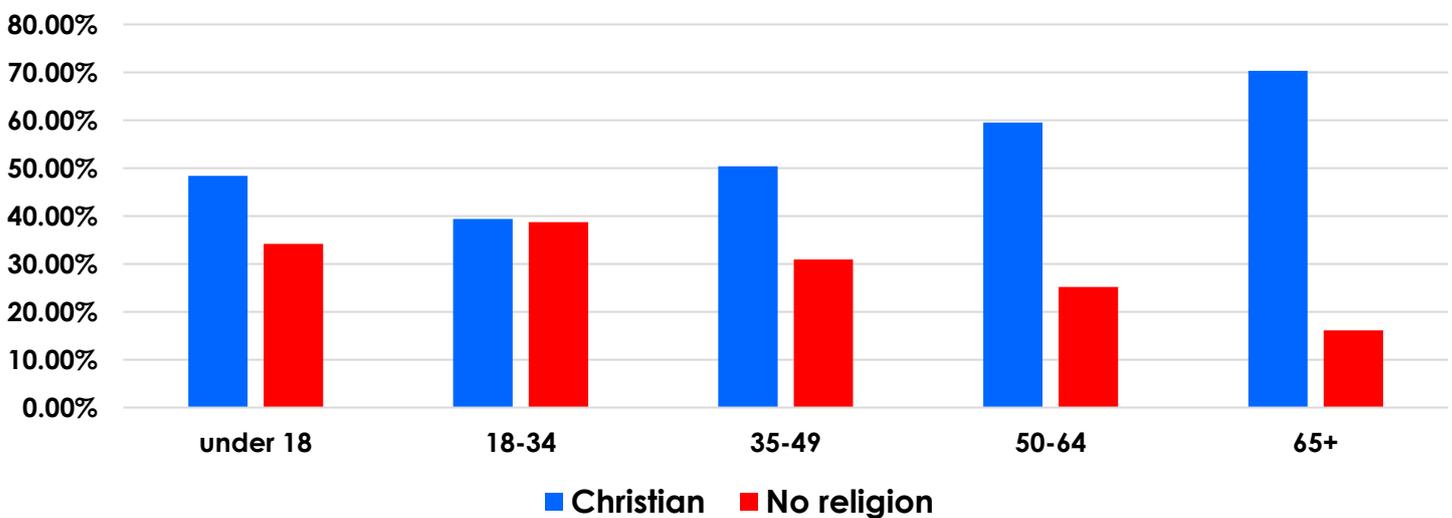
Religious affiliation in Australia



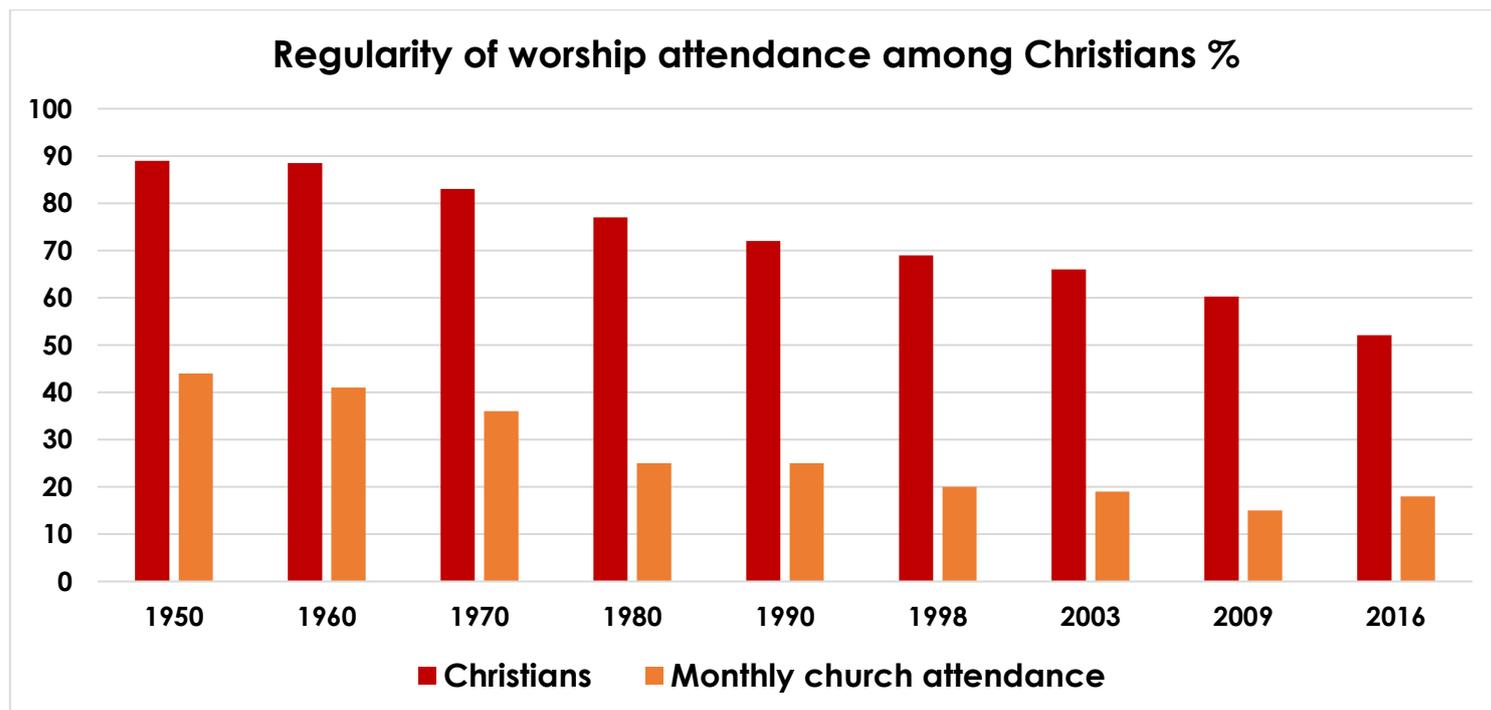
In the 1971 census, the instruction “If no religion, write ‘None’” was added, leading to an increase in the proportion of people in the ‘No religion’ category. In the 1991 census, No religion was introduced as a mark box underneath the ‘Other please specify’ box.

During the 2016 census the Australian Bureau of Statistics moved the ‘No religion’ response category to be the first response category in the question. This led to a significant increase in those identifying with this category. As depicted in the graph below, the younger generations are more likely to identify with no religion.

Religious affiliation by age



The decline of the regularity of Christians at worship is indicative of the growing apathy among those who identify as Christian.



‘Have we failed to consider the implications for our LCA of moving from a churched culture to a non-churched culture in the space of a generation? Have we failed to adapt?’

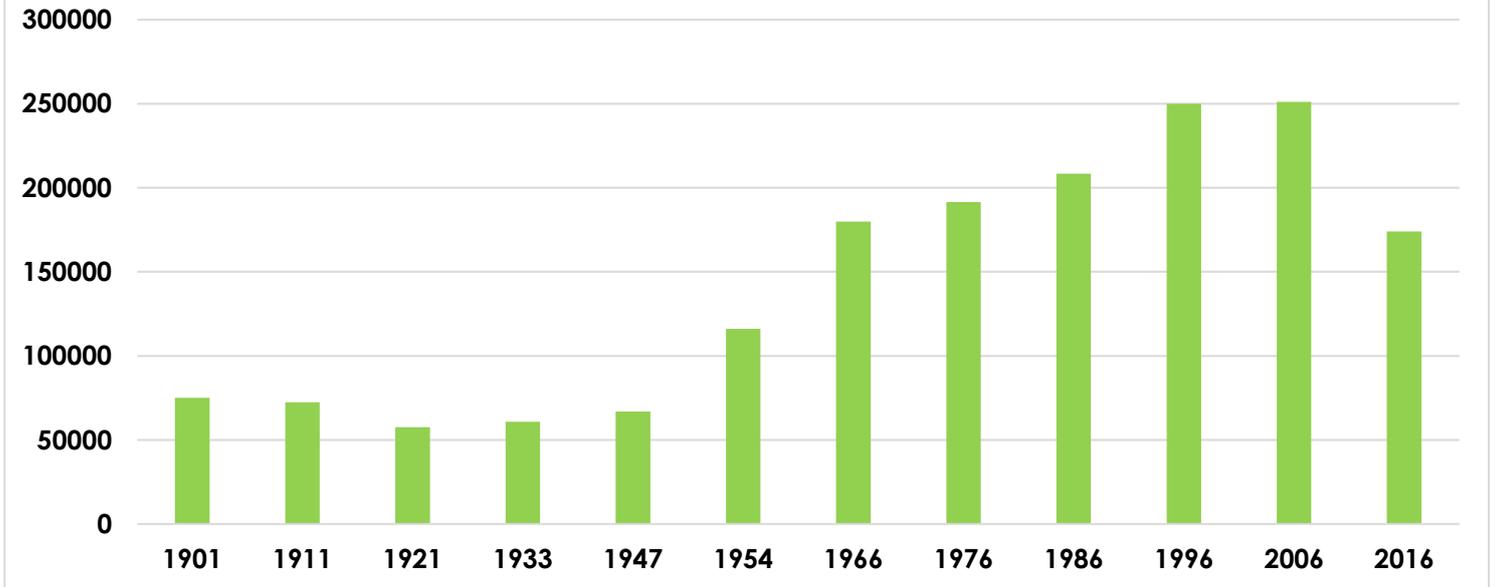
Lutheran affiliation in Australia

Census data of the number of Australians who identify as Lutheran demonstrates some significant changes occurring over the years. Numbers declined post World War One (1914-1918), owing probably to the traditional association of Lutherans with Germany.

Post World War Two (1939-1945) there were significant numbers of immigrants from European countries with a strong Lutheran identity, leading to an increase of those identifying as Lutheran. The increases post 1986 might be attributed to the increasing number of students in Lutheran schools post this time.

The 2016 census did not have ‘Lutheran’ as a designated category under choices given for church denomination. This would account for the significant decrease, just as there was a significant increase between 1986 and 1991, when ‘Lutheran’ was added as a category.

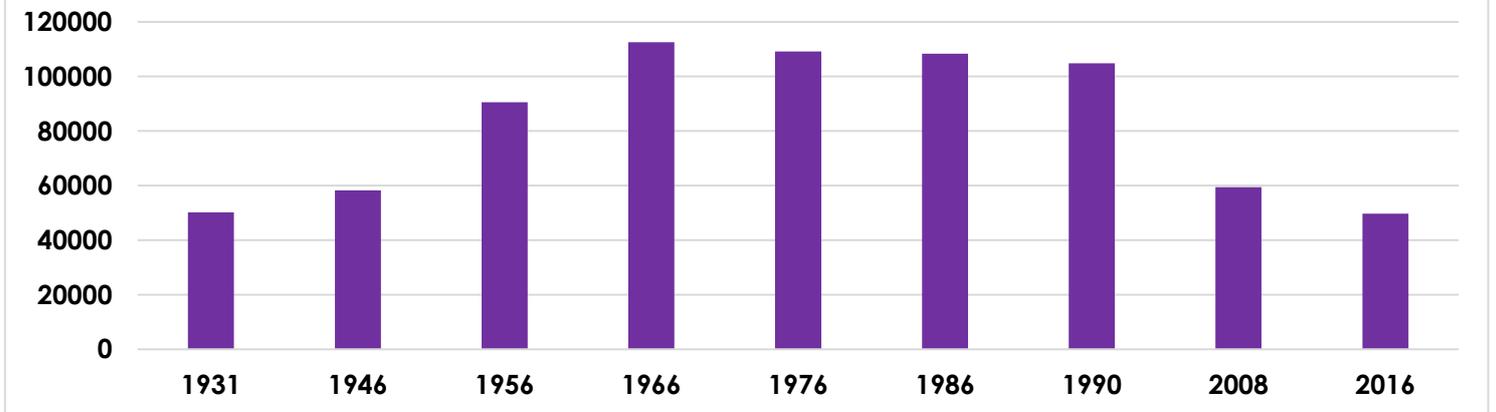
Lutherans in Australia



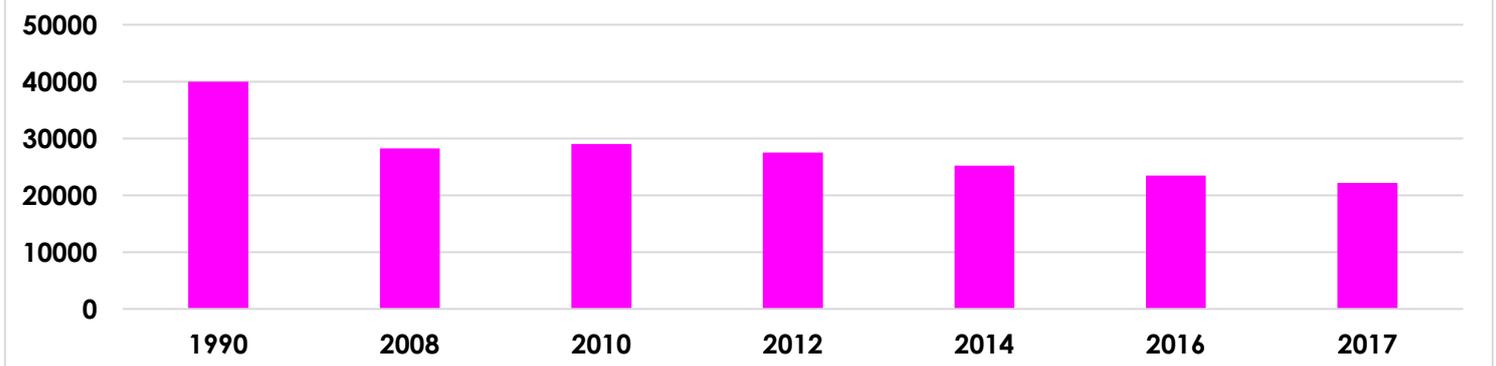
The Lutheran Church in Australia

The decline in the Lutheran Church of Australia, in both baptised members and average weekly attendance, has been more significant than the general decline of Christianity.

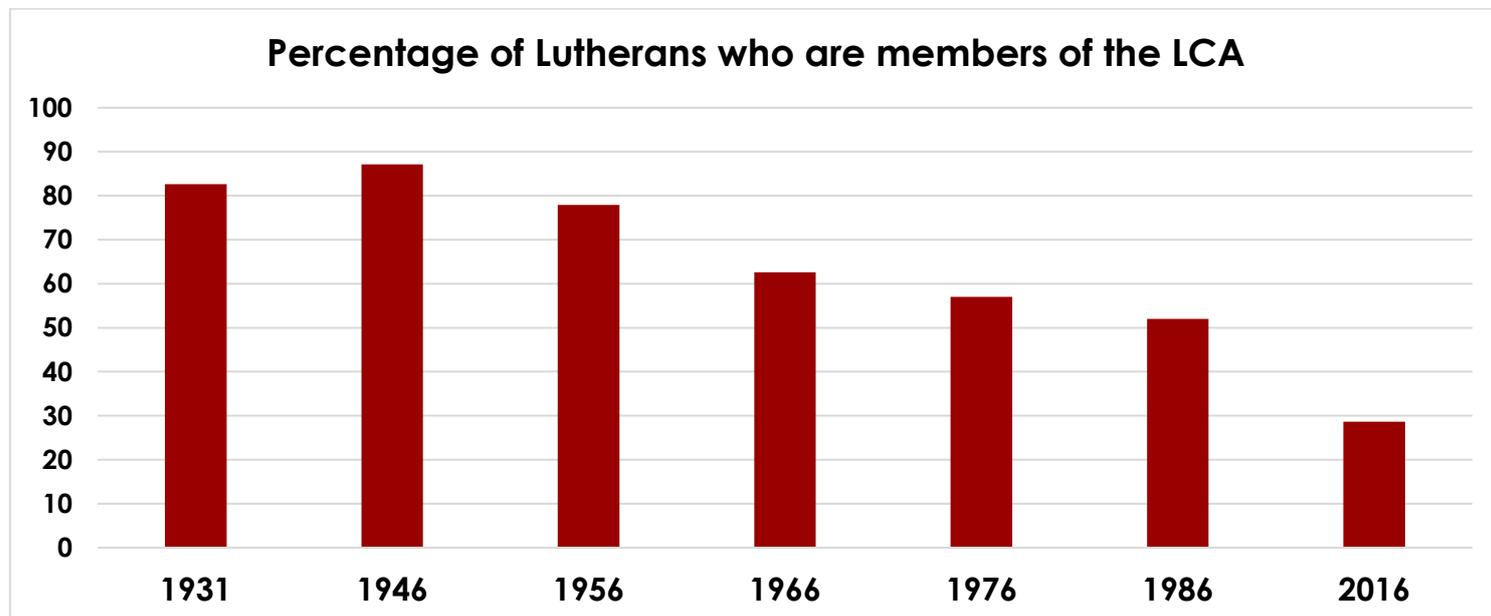
Baptised membership of the LCA (UELCA/ELCA)



Average weekly attendance Lutheran Church of Australia



A worrying trend is the steady decrease in LCA membership as a percentage of those identifying as Lutheran in Australia. This signifies a growing disconnect between those who identify as Lutheran and those who officially associate with the LCA.



In 1966

- Christians made up 88.2% of the Australian population
- Lutherans made up 1.54% of the Australian population
- Members of the LCA made up 0.99% of the Australian population
- 64% of those who identified as Lutheran were members of the LCA

In 2016

- Christians made up 52.2% of the Australian population (41% decrease)
- Lutherans made up 0.71% of the Australian population (54% decrease)
- Members of the LCA made up 0.21% of the Australian population (79% decrease)
- 26% of those who identified as Lutheran were members of the LCA

Why is there a growing gulf between those who identify as Lutheran and those who are actually members of the LCA?

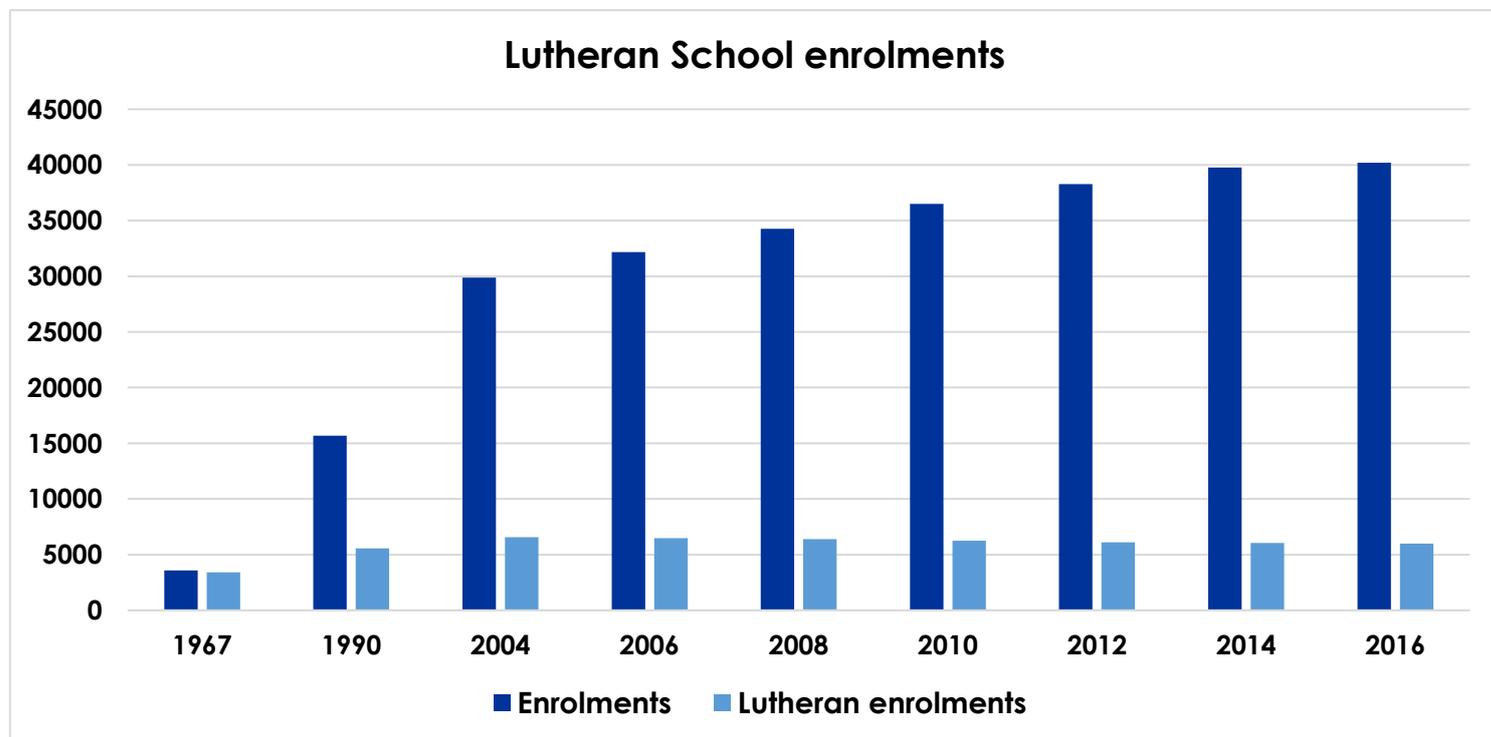
One reason is the number of Lutheran immigrants who come to Australia and don't join the LCA. In 2011 23% of Australians who identified as Lutheran were members of the LCA. But only 13% of those born overseas who identified as Lutheran were members of the LCA.

Another reason could be the increasing number of people associated with Lutheran schools and aged care facilities who likewise identify with the Lutheran denomination without formalising membership in the LCA.

There could be other reasons why people have left the LCA but still identify as Lutheran (e.g. lapsed membership and apathy; worshipping with other denominations whilst still retaining their Lutheran identity; disgruntled at issues facing the LCA at this time).

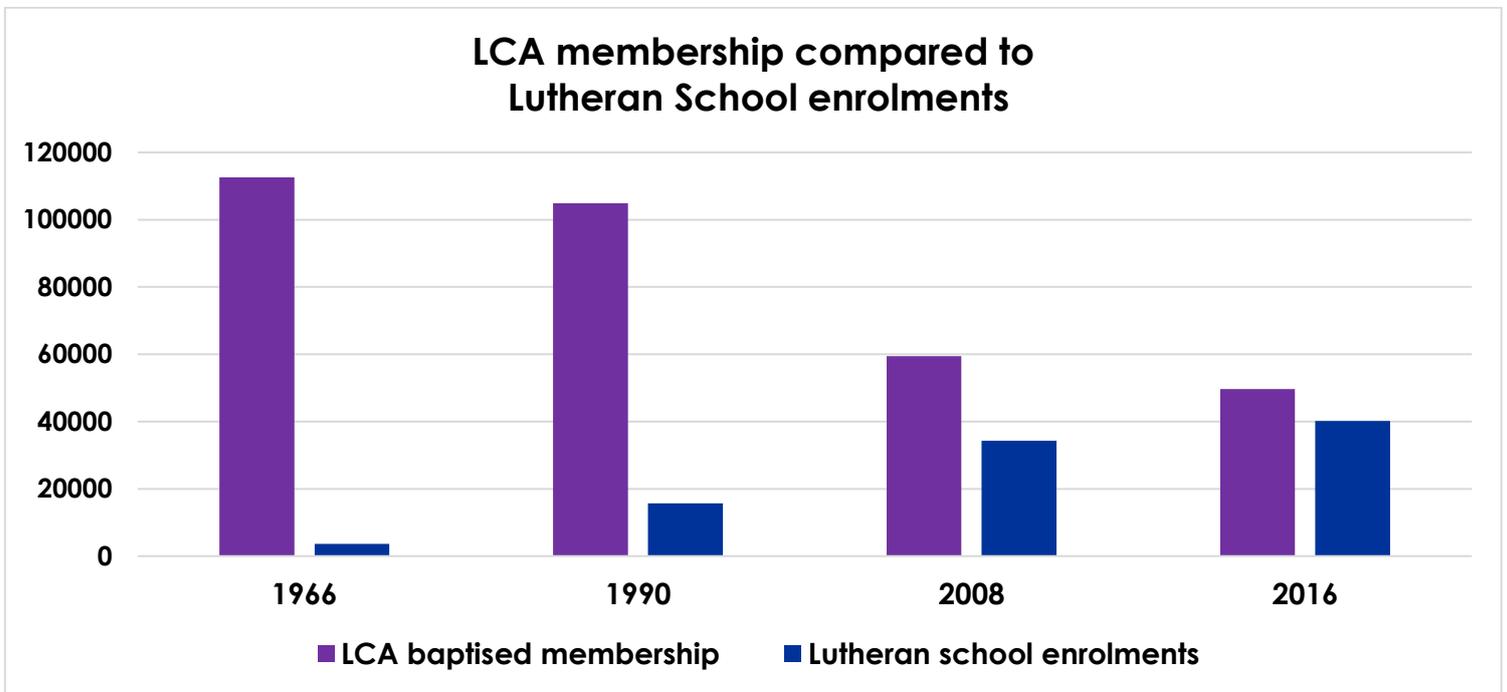
Lutheran Schools

Enrolments in Lutheran schools underwent significant growth from the 1980's and has since plateaued. The number of Lutheran enrolments in Lutheran schools has remained consistent.



The size of the Lutheran School system comparative to the baptized membership of the LCA has changed significantly in the last 50 years. This has raised questions about the capacity of the LCA to service its schools with Lutheran staff, even its principals.

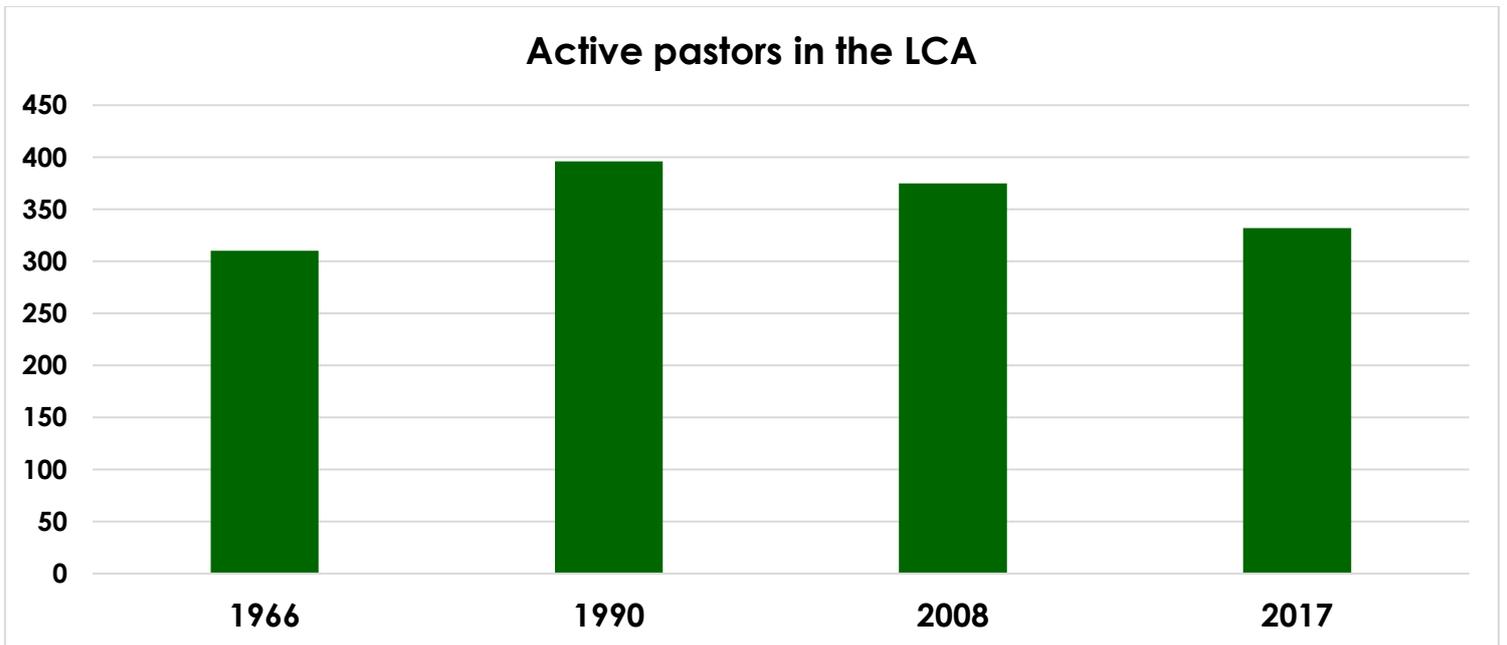
LCA membership compared to Lutheran School enrolments



Pastoral supply

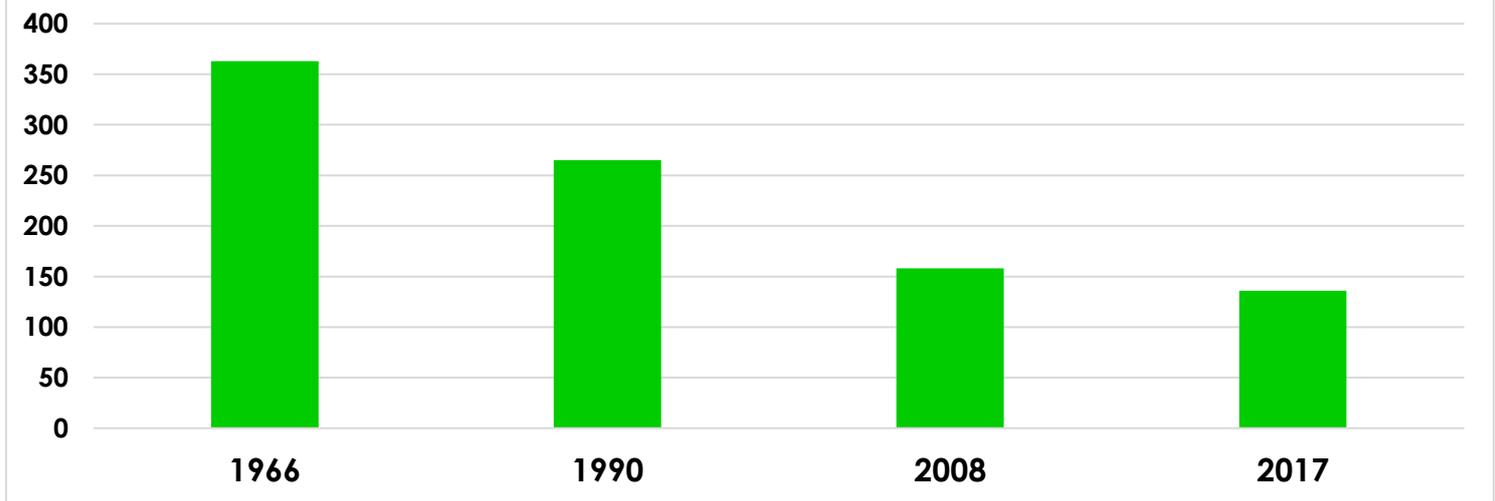
Currently there are about 40 pastoral vacancies in the LCA. This may rise to as many as 60 in the near future. In recent years there are fewer pastoral candidates entering Australian Lutheran College.

Active pastors in the LCA



However, if the number of active pastors are compared to the number of baptised members in the LCA the question can be raised about whether there is a shortage at all. There were 363 baptised members for every active LCA pastor in 1966. In 2017 there were only 136 baptised members for every active LCA pastor.

Number of baptised members per active LCA pastor



It should be noted that the number of pastors in parish ministry is decreasing as a proportion of the active pastors. In 1990 74% of active pastors were in parish ministry. In 2017 that number has decreased to 65%. The number of school pastors has remained steady between 1990 and 2017. The number of pastors serving at ALC has decreased.

It is the number of pastors in other LCA positions, in aged care and on leave of absence that have increased.

Given the increasing expense of financing a pastor position (serving a diminishing number of people) is this placing a financial burden on our members rather than releasing them to engage in God's ministry and mission?

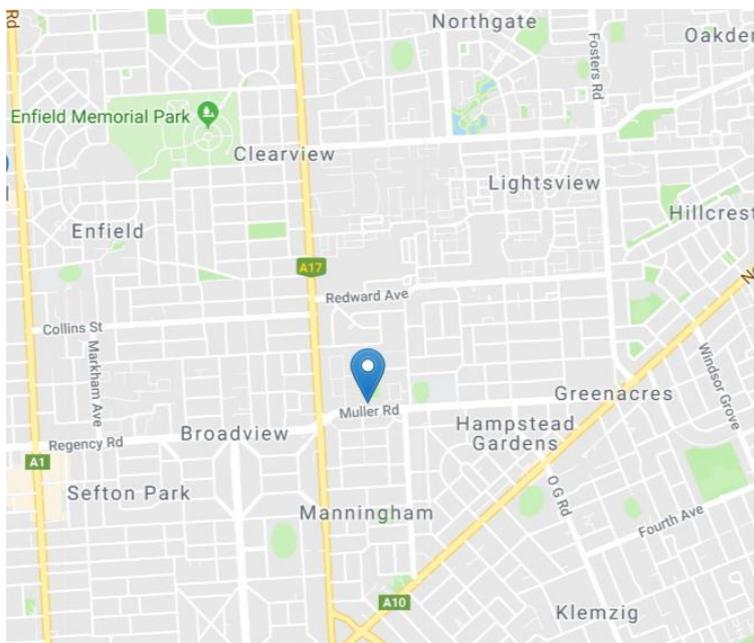
It would appear a lot of energy is being expended by our members in sustaining a model of church that is simply unsustainable.

As numbers have diminished a number of congregations have closed and parishes have re-aligned. This has occurred out of necessity rather than according to any strategic plan. Congregations have 'held on' for as long as they can, delaying the inevitable. The critical turning point has arrived for many congregations/parishes in the LCA.

Some pastors have staged their retirement by gradually decreasing their full-time equivalent in an endeavour to make themselves 'affordable'. The intent is admirable but it may have only masked the problem and created more issues when they eventually retire.

There is also a disproportionate workload among the pastorate in terms of the changes that have occurred over the course of time. Two case studies below demonstrate this.

Case Study 1: Hampstead, South Australia

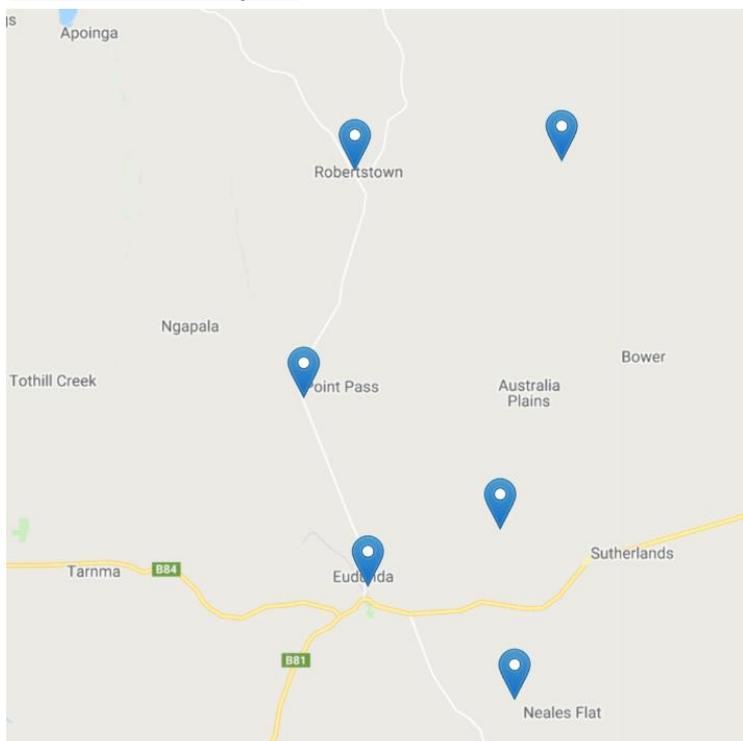


In 1990 the single-point parish of 460 baptised members was served by one pastor. There were 116 services, 26 baptisms, 3 weddings and 3 funerals.

In 2017 the single-point parish of 135 baptised members was served by one pastor. There were 60 services, 0 baptisms, 0 weddings and 0 funerals.

There is a reduction in the workload of the pastor in this case.

Case Study 2: Eudunda-Robertstown, South Australia



In 1990 the 2 parishes, covering 9 congregations and with 1118 baptised members was served by three pastors. There were 408 services, 14 baptisms, 8 weddings and 5 funerals.

In 2017 the one parish, covering 6 congregations of 463 baptised members was served by one pastor. There were 215 services, 3 baptisms, 1 wedding and 6 funerals.

There is an increase in the workload of the pastor in this case.

Have we inadvertently structured our ministry in such a way that we are expecting to decline? Is our current system of consolidating and realigning congregations and parishes simply postponing the inevitable?

The culture of our LCA and its ministry

As Lutherans we recognise that our worship is 'Divine Service', where our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ comes to serve us with his means of grace, the Word and Sacraments. It is through these means that the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith.

Our current model of ministry depends on the called and ordained minister to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Our LCA pastors have endeavoured to do this faithfully throughout the history of the church. Despite this, the church continues to decline.

We have endeavoured to solve this decline by addressing things such as the style and form of our worship and through implementing one well-meaning program after another. As nothing we do arrests the decline we can be tempted to lose faith in the power of God's Word and Spirit to create faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Have we created a one-dimensional model of ministry that has led to an unhealthy dependence on the ordained pastor? Is our current structure of ministry suited to a 'churched' culture rather than the 'unchurched' culture we are now in?

Our church appears to be very pastor dependent. A significant portion of the income of many congregations goes toward paying the salary and provisions for the ordained pastor (more than 60% in many cases). There is significant anxiety demonstrated by many congregations when they experience a pastoral vacancy. There is still a perception in the LCA that it is the pastor that does the significant 'ministry' in the church.

It is an oversimplification, but it appears that our members: Give their offerings in order to afford a pastor so he can put on a worship service so they can go to church.

This 'ministry dependence' model can inadvertently lead to a situation where the members simply receive the ministry that is provided for them and to them. Even in a 'churched' culture this is not a desirable model for ministry. But in an 'unchurched' culture it can hinder the ability of the church to engage in mission. Most of the effort could be exerted on delivering services to members rather than on reaching the unchurched.

The following surveys provide valuable information about the culture of our church.

National Church Life Survey 2016

In 2016 10,825 adult members (15+ years) and 674 children (8-14 years) from 306 Lutheran congregations participated in the National Church Life Survey (NCLS). This survey assessed the core qualities of 3 areas of church life.

The **Internal Core Qualities** focus on the inner life of the community of faith, and a measure is made of the extent to which the community: has an alive and growing **Faith**, experiences vital and nurturing **Worship** and feels a strong and growing **Belonging**

The **Inspirational Core Qualities** focus on the catalysts that inspire a church to move forward. A measure is made of the extent to which the church has: a clear and owned **Vision**, inspiring and empowering **Leadership** and openness to imaginative and flexible **Innovation**

The **Outward Core Qualities** focus on the outward looking life of the church, and a measure is made of the extent to which the church undertakes: practical and diverse **Service**, willing and effective **Faith-sharing** and intentional and welcoming **Inclusion**

A summary of some of the results of these core qualities are listed below.

Internal Core Qualities

Faith: 87% of attenders experienced some or much growth in their faith in last 12 months

Worship: 73% of attenders usually or always experience inspiration in worship

Belonging: 84% of attenders have a strong and stable or growing sense of belonging

Inspirational Core Qualities

Vision: 56% of attenders are aware of and partly or strongly committed to the local church's vision, goals and direction

Leadership: 54% of attenders said their local church leaders have encouraged them to find or use their gifts and skills to some or a great extent

Innovation: 65% of attenders agree or strongly agree their local church is always ready to try something new

Outward Core Qualities

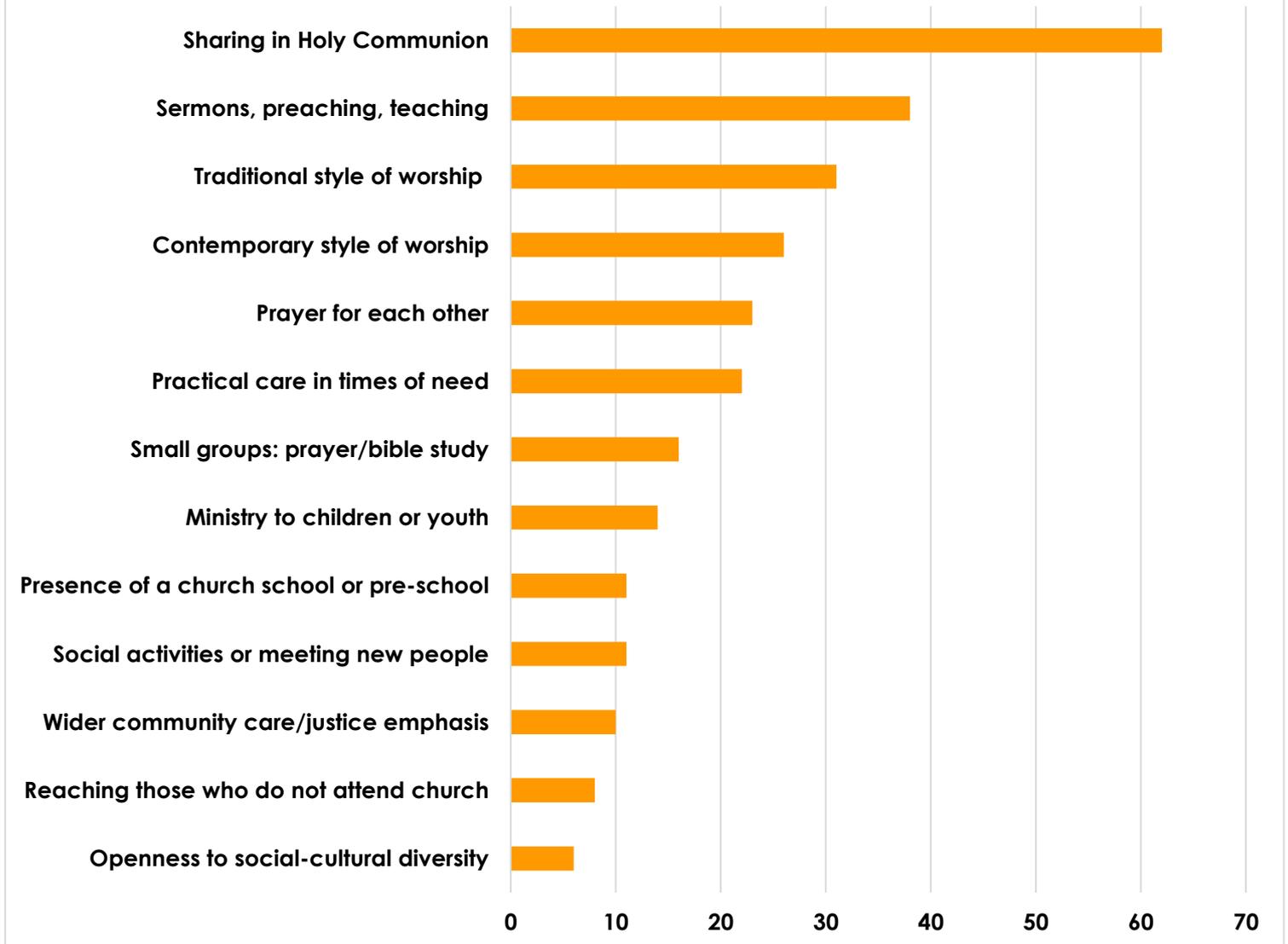
Service: 59% of attenders informally helped others in 3 or more ways in the last year

Faith-sharing: 31% of attenders have invited a friend or relative who does not currently attend church to a service in the last year
14% of attenders feel comfortable talking about their faith and look for opportunities to do so. 56% mostly feel at ease and will do so if it comes up

Inclusion: 20% of attenders are very likely or certain to follow up someone who has drifted away from church
49% of attenders will mostly or always personally seek out and welcome new people

Those surveyed were able to list up to three things they valued in the church community from a designated list (the results are recorded in the graph over the page):

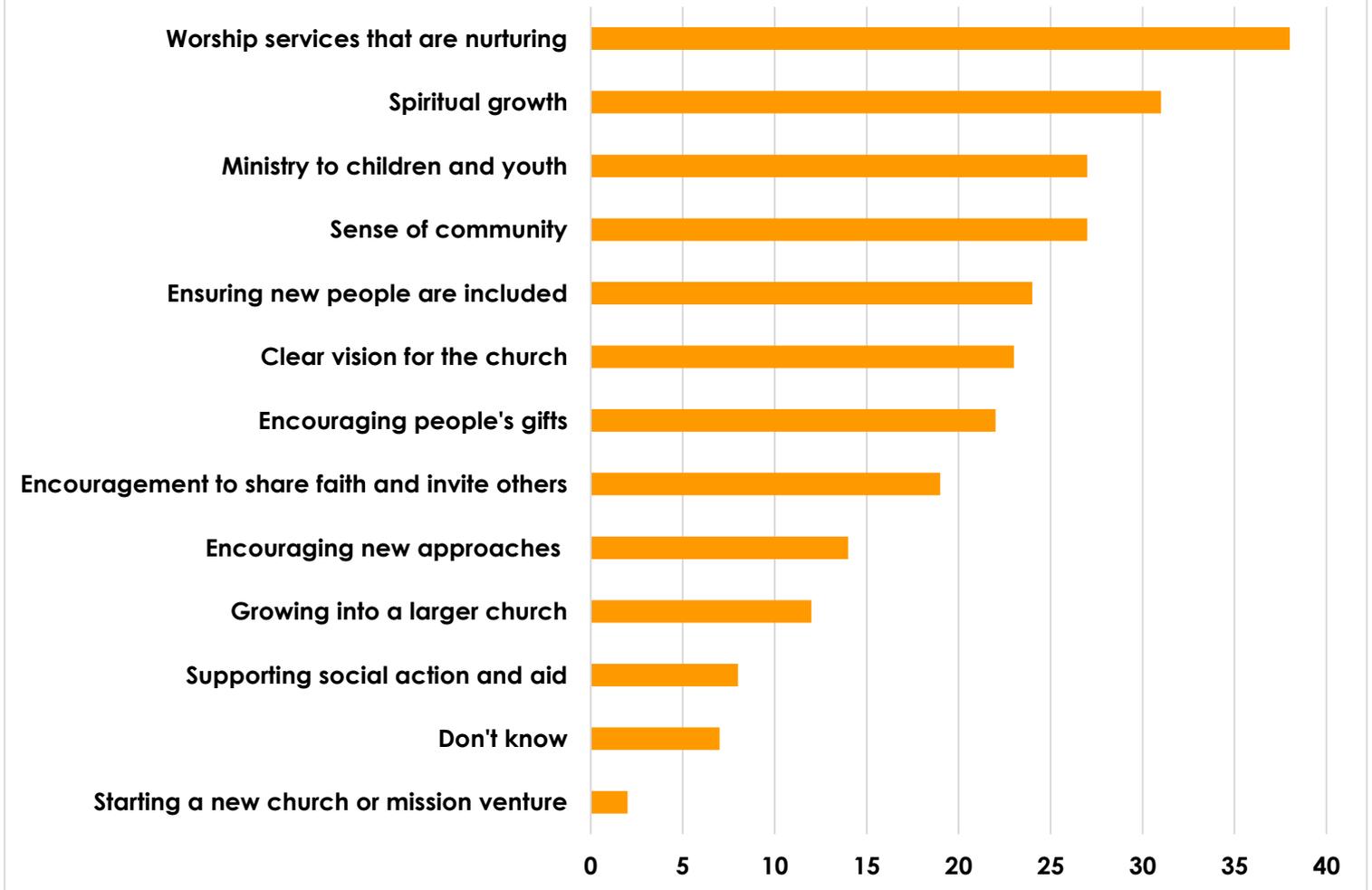
What we value and prioritise



The positive is that we value that which is valuable: God's Word and Sacraments and worship as God's people. The negative is that any outward focus on mission is considered of lesser value and priority. This reinforces the perception of a pastor dependent model of church that depends on the pastor to deliver the things we value.

Those surveyed were then asked what they felt needed to be given priority in the next 12 months (the results are recorded below):

Future priorities in the next 12 months



Inclusion of others was now seen as a higher priority, but the encouragement to share the faith and invite others was still in the bottom half of priorities. The highest priority to have worship services that are nurturing possibly reinforces an 'internal' mindset.

Children's Surveys (8-14years old)

A sample of the children's survey results are below:

Things our children think they are good at doing (top 3 responses and lowest response)

76% Being kind to people who don't have friends yet

68% Taking care of God's earth

63% Having lots of new and different ideas

36% Talking to other people about God/Jesus

Our children often do the following (top 3 responses and lowest response)

56% Say thank you to God

46% Ask God to help others

45% Say sorry to God

10% Talk to their friends about God

Our children's family members often do the following

54% Read the bible

28% have discussions about God/faith

22% ask their children what they have learnt at church

16% talk about their children's doubts/worries about faith

Our children's top 4 faith role models

88% mum 86% pastor 77% grandparent 75% dad

Our children's feelings about church services

29% always like it

49% like it most of the time

20% like it sometimes

2 % don't like it

These results give some insights into some of the issues facing our LCA.

The ALITE report

In 2015, at the direction of the College of Bishops, a study was conducted on pastoral ministry in the Lutheran Church of Australia. 201 pastors and 1,519 congregational members responded to the survey.

The report covered a range of areas:

- The characteristics of LCA pastors and members
- The personal well-being of pastors
- The personal faith and pastoral style of pastors
- The theological and ministry training of pastors
- Relationships with Principals and Schools
- Pastor and Community
- The current LCA call process
- Pastoral oversight (role of bishops)

The segment on the pastoral style studied the activities of pastors. Pastors ranked them according to the time they dedicated to the activities and the fulfilment they received from them. The congregation members ranked them according to their priority and the performance of their pastor in them. Those activities are listed below:

Administration of sacraments	Hospital visitation
Care for elderly	Ministry to in-actives
Children & youth	Parish Administration
Community involve.	Prayer
Counselling/care	Preaching
Ecumenical roles	Teaching
Equipping of laity	Weddings & funerals
Evangelism/apologetics	Wider LCA roles
Home visitation	Worship Leadership

Priority was given to preaching, worship leadership and administration of the sacraments. Less priority was given to equipping the laity, ministry to in-actives, community involvement and evangelism/apologetics.

The current dependence on the ordained pastor to effectively perform such a wide range of activities limits the effectiveness of our communities in their ministry-mission.

There needs to be an ownership by the community of this ministry-mission **and** the capacity to diversify their ministry structures and roles to effect that. We currently order our ministry in such a way that the ordained pastor exclusively has the authority to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments.

‘Do we have the scope in our LCA to diversify ministry roles beyond the ordained pastor in word and sacrament ministry?’

We have currently derived exceptions to the rule. In the absence of a fully trained pastor we have authorised Specific Ministry Pastors (SMP) to carry out word and sacrament ministry or licensed certain individuals to do so.

‘Rather than coming up with exceptions to the rule, is it time that we derived a new rule for our structure of ministry?’

We need to distinguish between what kind of challenge we currently face as an LCA. Is it a technical one or an adaptive one?

Technical

The problem & solution are readily apparent

An authority figure can solve it

When solved it will go back to the way it was

For it to be solved attitudes, values and behaviours do not need to change

Adaptive

The problem & solution are not readily apparent

An authority figure can not solve it

When solved it will not go back to the way it was

For it to be solved attitudes, values and behaviours do need to change

‘The issue facing our LCA does not require a technical fix but an adaptive solution. What is preventing us from addressing this issue in an adaptive manner?’

There is a fear the changes required may compromise our theology.

A study of our Lutheran Confessions would suggest we have the scope and flexibility to adapt our structure of ministry. It could be that our theology demands we do so.

Lutheran Confessions

Augsburg Confession

V The office of the Ministry

God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.

*The office of the ministry is not described **specifically** as an individual office of an ordained minister but **generally** as the provision of the Gospel and the sacraments.*

VII The Church

It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.

The proper proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments are seen as sufficient to ensure the unity of the church. Uniformity of ceremonies 'instituted by men' is not necessary. It is worth a conversation to determine what 'ordering' of our ministry is instituted by men and what is instituted by God.

XIII The use of the Sacraments

It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God's will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith.

Our teaching on the sacraments indicates how essential they are to awaken and strengthen faith. We should ensure that any ordering of our ministry enables ready access to the sacraments rather than any limitation of accessibility to them.

XIV Order in the Church

It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.

What constitutes a 'regular call' and who has the authority to issue that call? Is it the individual congregation concerned or is it the synod or is it a combination of the two? Is this call limited to the one office of the ordained pastor or is there flexibility to extend that call to other layers of ministry?

Apology of the Augsburg Confession

XIV Order in the Church

...we have given frequent testimony in the assembly to our deep desire to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority.

The established hierarchy in the church is useful to ensure good order and the proper proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. If that hierarchy ever impedes that proclamation and administration then the Gospel would take precedence.

Smalcald Articles

Part III; Article X Ordination and Vocation

If the bishops wanted to be true bishops and to attend to the church and the gospel, then a person might—for the sake of love and unity but not out of necessity—give them leave to ordain and confirm us and our preachers, provided all the pretense and fraud of unchristian ceremony and pomp were set aside. However, they are not now and do not want to be true bishops. Rather, they are political lords and

princes who do not want to preach, teach, baptize, commune, or perform any proper work or office of the church. In addition, they persecute and condemn those who do take up a call to such an office. Despite this, the church must not remain without servants on their account. Therefore, as the ancient examples of the church and the Fathers teach us, we should and will ordain suitable persons to this office ourselves.

The first ministers in the Protestant churches faced questions over their legitimacy to hold that office outside of the authority of the Catholic bishops. They referred to the need to preach, teach, baptize and commune in service of the Gospel, which gave them the right to ordain suitable persons to the office.

Part III; Article XII The Church

God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and —the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd. This is why children pray in this way, 'I believe in one holy Christian church'. This holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, long albs, or other ceremonies of theirs that they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures. Its holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith.

The power is invested in the Word.

Formula of Concord

Article X Church Usages

We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them, without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum and the edification of the Church.

The congregation has a degree of flexibility in the ordering of its ministry to ensure its maximum effectiveness.

Theses of Agreement

V The Church

- 1 The Church...is the people of God (1 Pet 2:9), the communion or congregation of saints, which Christ has called, enlightened and gathered through the Holy Spirit by the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments
- 8 '...the means of grace are the only and essential notae infallibly indicating the existence of the Church on earth' 'Faith knows and trusts that wherever the essential marks of the Church are present, there the true Church is, inasmuch as God has promised that His Word shall not return unto Him void. Isaiah 55:10, 11.
- 10 Holy Scripture applies the term 'church' (ecclesia) also to the true believers at any given locality who are gathered about the Word and the Sacraments.
- 11 The congregation is therefore truly ecclesia and is endowed by the Lord of the Church with the Power of the Keys
- 13 It is clearly the will of God that Christians unite and assemble in congregations (Acts 2:42-44; Phil 1:27-2:4; 1:1; Heb 10:25; Gal 1:2) (a) for the hearing and learning of God's Word (Acts 2:42; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:27); (b) for the celebration of the Sacraments and the practice of Christian love and fellowship (1 Cor 10:17; 11:30,33; 1:10; Acts 2:42; Col 3:15f) (c) for the exercise of both private and public admonition and church discipline (Matt 18:15ff; 1 Cor 5:4ff, 13).

The essentials of the church are clearly articulated in this agreement and the congregation of believers gathered around word and sacrament are given incredible autonomy. If we fail to address the need for flexibility in ministry structure then congregations may take it upon themselves to do so. And they have sufficient justification in our teachings to support them.

VI The Office of the Ministry

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.

- 2 The office of the ministry is therefore an office instituted not by man, but by God
- 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.
- 5 The office of the ministry is essentially an office of service to the Lord and His Church with the Word and the Sacraments
- 7 'No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called' (A.C. 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 1:24) into the office of the ministry publicly to exercise the functions of this office.
- 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.

- 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
- 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...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.

Once again the focal point of the office of the ministry is the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Also, the congregation is identified as the primary origin of the call to the ministry. Any new proposed ministry structure for the LCA would need to have at its core the local call to ministry, revolving around the effective proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments.

Conclusion

I believe the time is right to throw caution to the wind and road-test some possible alternative structures of ministry at the local level. Rather than have SMP's and other authorised individuals as exceptions to the rule and in the absence of a 'fully trained' pastor, I believe there should be a multi-dimensional model of word and sacrament ministry in the presence of a pastor and under his oversight.

A possible future vision for the church is where every congregation and faith community has multiple people who are duly called, authorised and trained to effect word and sacrament ministry under the oversight of a pastor in the region. These positions can be volunteer or receive stipends to varying degrees.

This would reduce the debilitating effect of small communities having to support the significant salary of a 'fully trained' pastor.

In effect our fully trained pastors would be acting as bishops. This would require a new model of training for pastors into the future and some re-training of our current pastorate. What that looks like would be determined by what we encounter by any pilot cases we explore.

In the SA-NT District I would suggest that the Yorke Peninsula and Darwin would be good options for such a pilot.

Respectfully submitted

Stephen Schultz

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March 2019