



Lutheran Church of Australia 20th Convention of General Synod 2021-22

REPORT

ON THE 2021 ONLINE SESSIONS

Prepared for LCA NZ congregations by LCA Communications, 26 October 2021

This report contains highlights of the online sessions of Convention of General Synod, held 1-2 October. Visit the Business page of the General Synod website (www.generalsynod.lca.org.au) to read the reports and proposals that came to the online sessions of General Synod, as well as those which will come before the in-person sessions in 2022. You can also watch the recorded Synod sessions. Your delegate will be able to provide more information. Ongoing, to keep abreast of LCA NZ news, including that pertaining to the 2022 in-person sessions of General Synod, sign up to the fortnightly LCA eNews via www.lca.org.au/enews

What is Synod?

Every three years the General Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia (including the Lutheran Church of New Zealand) meets in Convention to perform its constitutional functions as the highest governing body in the church.

Synod is made up of lay delegates from LCA NZ parishes, together with pastor and school principal delegates, members of the General Church Board, chairs of other boards and councils, district bishops and former LCA NZ bishops. The ratio of laypeople to pastors is approximately 2:1.

General Synod has the power to make changes to the LCA Constitution and authorise the General Church Board and other church bodies to perform certain tasks and report back to a subsequent Convention of Synod.

This year, for the first time Synod sessions were conducted online, due to travel restrictions and other COVID-related complications ruling out an in-person meeting. The 20th General Synod will continue in 2022 at in-person sessions at a date and venue to be decided.

Approximately 400 people participated in the online sessions of the 20th General Synod, including, for the first time, six First Nations delegates from the three new Language Area Agreement groups from Central Australia.

Meeting and worshipping online

The online sessions ran smoothly overall, thanks to the diligent pre-Synod work done by most delegates.

Overwhelmingly, the delegates who attended one or more of the 10 online information and practice sessions offered before the two-day event were prepared and ready to fully participate in General Synod, which included voting via the OpaVote platform.

Participants were supported by more than 80 people working on the technical and administrative aspects of running the live, online and interactive General Synod, which was hosted and supported by Concordia College in suburban Adelaide.

The technical aspects of the online sessions included livestreaming worship services from Queensland and Victoria. Bishops Mark Vainikka and Lester Priebbenow respectively opened the Friday and Saturday sessions with reflections on Isaiah 55, particularly the Synod theme, 'Come, listen, live' (v3). On Sunday morning, retiring LCA NZ Bishop John Henderson preached at a service hosted by St John's Unley. All Synod services can be viewed on the General Synod website (Session Replays).

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Elections, installations and farewell

General Synod elected Pastor Paul Smith, the immediate past bishop of the Queensland District, to be the LCA NZ's next bishop.

Currently serving a six-month placement at St Peter's Lutheran College Indooroopilly, Pastor Smith will be installed as the LCA NZ bishop early in 2022. He succeeds Pastor John Henderson, who has served as bishop since 2013 and did not seek re-election.

Delegates also elected a new assistant bishop, Pastor Neville Otto. Currently serving the St Paul's Box Hill congregation in suburban Melbourne, Pastor Otto has formerly served the church as president of the New South Wales District and subsequently in the churchwide role of Secretary of the Church. As the LCA NZ assistant bishop, he succeeds Rev Dr Andrew Pfeiffer, who had served in the role since 2015 and did not stand for re-election.

The church welcomes newly elected GCB member, Hobart barrister Kim Baumeler. Joining her on GCB are Pastor Tim Stringer and lay members Paul Argyle, Charmaine Harch, Tim Wiebusch, Mel Zerner and Peter Zweck, who were re-elected. Former GCB members Faye Schmidt, who was first elected to General Church Council as it was then called in 2015, and Assistant Bishop Pastor Andrew Pfeiffer who also served from 2015, did not nominate for re-election and were thanked for their service by Bishop Henderson.

While not elected by Synod, the Lutheran Women of Australia (LWA) Executive Committee was installed to lead the LCA NZ auxiliary for the next three years. The installation by LCA NZ Bishop John Henderson of LWA President Grace Kroehn, Vice-President Maureen Turner, Secretary Val Schild, Treasurer Beryl Smith and Extra Member Dianne Adams took place on Sunday 3 October during the Sunday worship service hosted by St John's Unley.

Farewell to Bishop Henderson

Bishop John Henderson, who had announced that he would not be standing for re-election as LCA NZ bishop, was formally thanked for his service in the role. During a rite of farewell, at which his wife Valmai and other members of his immediate family were present, he presented personal reflections on his nine-year term as bishop. The session can be viewed on the General Synod website (Session Replays, Saturday Session 4). Pastor Henderson will conclude his service as bishop and retire from the active pastoral ministry in December.

Ecclesiastical Discipline and LCA Constitution working groups

General Synod received the report of the Ecclesiastical Discipline Review Team and the report on Phase 1 of the LCA Constitution Review and authorised further work to be undertaken and presented to the in-person sessions in 2022.

On 20 October the General Church Board called for expressions of interest from people willing to be considered for service on an Ecclesiastical Discipline steering committee and a Constitution Review working group. These teams will be charged with building on the work already done and making recommendations to the GCB. The intent is for GCB to bring proposals to the 2022 in-person sessions of the 20th General Synod.

Board and council reports

According to the requirements of the LCA Constitution, written reports from the LCA governing bodies were included in the Book of Reports. These bodies also presented at the online sessions on their activities for the past synodical period.

Following a governance restructure approved by the 2018 General Synod, the number of churchwide reporting boards and councils is now reduced to six, namely: General Church Board, Council for Local Mission and the boards of Australian Lutheran College, Australian Lutheran World Service, Lutheran Education Australia and Finke River Mission. The Lutheran Laypeople's League also provided a report to the Synod as did the LCA's commissions.

Synod ratified the revised constitutions of Australian Lutheran World Service and Australian Lutheran College.

Centenary of LLL

Synod noted with thanks to God the centenary of the LLL, without whom innumerable mission and ministry endeavours of the church would not have been possible. The LLL is the major sponsor of the 20th General Convention of Synod.

2022 in-person sessions

At the conclusion of the online sessions, the 20th Convention of General Synod was adjourned until it reconvenes at the in-person sessions in 2022. The date and venue will be advised as soon as possible.

More information

www.generalsynod.lca.org.au

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