

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME III

#### H. ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

## Caring for God's Creation

*Prepared by the Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions. Adopted by the General Church Board, 21 April 2023*

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### PREAMBLE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1). We are all creatures in God's ongoing work of creation. God established humans as stewards of this creation (Gen 1:28, 2:15) and God looked over all that he had done and saw that it was very good! (Gen 1:31a).

We believe that God "richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. ... All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him" (Luther's Explanation of Apostle's Creed).

Humanity's original relationship with the creator was broken by sin, and all creation continues to be affected by our sin (Gen 3). We have been reconciled to God through Christ's redeeming sacrifice, but proper relationships between God, and us, and all creation will only be fully restored when Christ returns (Rom 8:19-21). "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." (Rom 8:22)

In the meantime, we are called to live our daily lives as children of the light (1 Thess 5:5) and guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14). As people who live under God's saving rule here on earth through faith in Christ, we are called to be caretakers of his creation and witnesses to God's ongoing redemption of all creation.

Today, the best scientific knowledge shows us that damage to creation by humanity's unsustainable lifestyles has caused an unprecedented ecological crisis to emerge, including climate change, pollution, deforestation, species extinction and loss of

biodiversity. Both secular and religious world leaders are emphasising that urgent action is now required to address this damage which disproportionately affects the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

This statement provides ethical guidance for members of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand (the Church) who, in living out their shared humanity with others, care for God's creation. This statement also gives suggestions for how the Church, through its congregations and agencies, can demonstrate good stewardship of creation.

God didn't stop creating on the sixth day. God continues to create, to heal and to restore. Unlike the despair and hopelessness that is sometimes seen in secular environmentalism, as Christians we rejoice that God is always in control. Our hope is not in human strength and wisdom, but rather our hope is in Christ who is "making everything new" (Rev 21:5). God desires to work through us in his work of caring for and bringing healing to his creation.

## THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

In Genesis, when God first creates the heavens and the earth, God instructs humanity to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and to subdue it (Gen 1:28), meaning to safeguard and care for creation. After the fall, when sin entered the world, this role of caretaker was corrupted by greed, pride and disobedience to God. Humanity has misinterpreted this call to subdue, believing that people have a right to take whatever they want from the earth, and they continue to use the Earth's resources unsustainably.

Studies over the last 50 to 100 years have now raised awareness of the fragility and interconnectedness of earth's systems. It is now clear that the demands of contemporary, consumer-driven lifestyles are seriously damaging the earth's ability to sustain life in the way that God intended. Climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity are all consequences of inconsiderate and greedy lifestyles, and these need to be acknowledged and addressed. We should continually turn to God in repentance, asking for his grace and forgiveness, and seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance to live humbly and justly.

In the Apostles' Creed we confess "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Luther begins his explanation of the Creed with "I believe that God has made me and all creatures." Humanity is interlinked with all of creation. We are formed from the dust of the earth (Gen 3:19). Scripture proclaims our connection with other creatures (Ps 104, Job 38-39), and we are called to join with "everything that has breath" (Ps 150:6) to praise the Lord. "The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Is 55:12) as we are led forth in joy and peace by our loving God.

Redeemed by Christ's sacrifice and sanctified by the Holy Spirit's work in us, we are called to follow God's original plan for humanity to "till and tend" God's creation (Gen 2:15). We are called to care for the poor and marginalised (Matt 25:31-46), and such people are the ones most affected by environmental degradation. Through Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, God's rule is here and now, and we are called to live by the values of God's Kingdom, which include living in peace and harmony with all creation (Is 11:1-9).

This statement outlines how God's people, gathered as the Church, can care for creation in the Church's operations. It also outlines how the Church can equip its members to care for creation in response to God's vocational call to live out their baptism in all aspects of their life.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this statement is to affirm our responsibility as Christians to be faithful stewards of creation, and to suggest actions to support and encourage this stewardship. It is relevant to all levels of the Church – from individuals to congregations, groups and agencies.

This statement is not intended to present a prescriptive list of actions that must be followed by individuals, congregations, and agencies. Instead, it provides a set of guidelines and suggestions that these groups can use as a starting point for developing their own creation care actions as appropriate to their circumstances and available within their resources.

The 2015 LCANZ Doctrinal Statement and Theological Opinion “God's Creation: A Sacred Responsibility” from CTICR provides an extended and detailed exploration of the issue of humanity's relationship with creation, and our responsibility to care for creation. This statement provides some more concrete suggestions for how individuals, congregations and agencies of the Church might address that responsibility.

This statement is in response to the 2015 General Synod Resolution presented by the Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions and Australian Lutheran World Service, which appears as Appendix 1.

## RELEVANCE

The statement is relevant to all ministries and activities of the Church, including but not restricted to:

- Churchwide Office, Boards, Committees, Agencies and Departments
- District Offices, Boards, Committees, Agencies and Departments
- Congregations, and their councils, officers, agencies and staff
- Schools, Colleges and Early Learning Centres
- Community Services, including Aged-Care Services
- Other Agencies of the Church

## OBJECTIVES OF THIS STATEMENT

- To encourage and support action throughout the Church to fulfil our role as responsible stewards of creation.
- To acknowledge that creation is in distress, and to acknowledge that our current human lifestyle is incompatible with a long-term sustainable existence that respects and values God's creation.
- To better articulate the Church's understanding of humanity's relationship with the rest of creation and to give full weight to the doctrine of God's past, present and future work in creation.
- To encourage members to work individually, in congregations, across the Church, and in cooperation with others in our communities to care for God's good creation.
- To encourage and support congregations, agencies and other ministries to give due consideration to care for creation in the planning and execution of their

activities, including worship, buildings and plant, meetings, education and transport.

- To provide support to those communities most affected by environmental issues, such as climate change, in partnership with agencies such as ALWS.
- To provide platforms for the sharing of creation care resources for individuals and groups.

## ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE CHURCH

Definition: Church Leadership Teams means all those office bearers, committee members and decision makers in the Church, including districts, agencies and congregations.

Church Leadership Teams are encouraged to intentionally consider how to undertake their activities in a way that best cares for creation. This might include:

- Encouraging the development, promotion, dissemination and use of resources for liturgy, worship, devotions, ministry to children and youth, education and outreach which emphasise the Church's role in God's mission to care for creation, and which give praise to God for the gift of a bountiful creation.
- Recognising that there are already many individuals, congregations and agencies who care for creation and who strive to live and operate sustainably and encourage them to share their stories and achievements.
- Acknowledging that Indigenous cultures have much to share about sustainable living and care for country, and encouraging dialogue with First Nations groups and individuals,
- Encouraging and support new initiatives and ongoing programs within the Church to care for creation, equip leaders with resources and networking, and share their stories and achievements.
- Encouraging congregations and agencies to consider how to operate more sustainably, including by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, by giving preference to the use of sustainable materials, by recycling, by reducing waste that is sent to landfill, by giving preference to native plantings in landscaping, and by developing and implementing an explicit creation-care plan.
- Working collaboratively with ecumenical, government, and community environmental groups, agencies, and organisations outside the Church who act to care for creation.
- Promoting the Church's prophetic role to proclaim God's continuing love and care for all creation, and also to proclaim our role as stewards to care for God's good creation. The Church provides this prophetic voice to its own members and to the broader community through word and through genuinely sacrificial action.
- Acknowledging that there are many difficult questions to be wrestled with, such as the tension between development and conservation, and confirm that we welcome the interaction of differing views and experiences in a spirit of the unity of the body of Christ.
- Providing care and support to communities in Australia and New Zealand, in our Pacific region, and across the world who are affected by the current environmental crisis.
- Regularly monitoring and reporting on progress in achieving this statement's objectives.

## RESPONSIBLE PERSON/S

- General Church Board (GCB) is responsible to ensure this statement is actively publicised across the LCANZ.
- District Church Boards (DCB) are responsible to ensure this statement and any related procedures are actively publicised within their respective Districts and to regularly evaluate achievements.
- Congregation/Parish Councils are responsible for considering this statement and any related procedures in their decisions about both capital projects and day to day operations and report achievements to their respective District.
- Governance Boards of all LCANZ-related entities are responsible for encouraging the consideration of this statement, where applicable, for decisions about both capital projects and day to day operations.

## SEE ALSO

"God's creation: a sacred responsibility", Commission on Theology and Inter Church Relations (CTICR), LCA Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, Volume 3, March 2015.

"Lutheran Education Earthcare Charter", Lutheran Education Australia, 2012 +, online at: <http://www.earthcare.lutheran.edu.au/>

### Appendix 1. 2015 LCANZ General Synod Resolution

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

"the LCA[/NZ] affirms that a prime responsibility of Christians is to be responsible stewards of creation and all life on the planet and encourages LCA[/NZ] members, congregations, groups and agencies to:

1. Intentionally and regularly include God's gift of creation and our stewardship and care in prayer and worship, individual and group study and church decision making.
2. Encourage, implement and model ways of living and working that minimise the production of greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Examine the long term implications of an economy which readily consumes and throws away.
4. Act to reduce waste and implement the sustainable use and recycling of earth's resources.
5. Wrestle with issues of resource and environmental justice for poor communities nations and future generations.
6. Engage in dialogue, discussion, shared learning and action with decision makers and environmental groups in the wider community."

#### Document Controls

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