

AGENDA 4.2.2

Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND KEY RESULTS AGAINST PLAN

- Establishment of Lutheran Earth Care Australia and New Zealand (LECANZ)
- Progress of Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts program to Prevent Domestic and Family Violence
- Progress on action plan for LECANZ to promote life as a means of engaging with the issue of abortion in Australia
- Preparation of briefing papers for the bishops on ethical issues related to COVID-19.

SUCSESSES

- Enhanced understanding of relationship between the Commission and other bodies in LECANZ and particularly between the Commission and CTICR.
- Provision of briefing papers for College of Bishops on COVID-19 ethical issues
- Met LECANZ recommendation to include an under 35-year-old on LECANZ Committee
- LECANZ is a partner in a successful research application related to Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

- Volunteers, including working groups have limited time to work on projects - limits response.
- Limits in the Commission members' understanding of Lutheran theological concepts that assist in navigating ethical issues.
- Impact of COVID-19 on meeting face to face – greater reliance on online meetings.

MAJOR IDENTIFIED RISKS

- The Commission needs to reflect or take account of a diversity of attitudes and theological approaches within the LECANZ.
- Other than consultants, the Commission members are volunteers. With only four meetings per year, the Commission struggles to respond rapidly to requests.

MEMBERS

Christian Fandrich, Cathryn Hamilton (Chairperson), Elizabeth Jewson, Kimberley Pfeiffer, Andrew Ruddell, Helene Schulz, Richard Haar (ALC Consultant), Nick Schwarz (Consultant), Paul Smith (CoB)

BACKGROUND

According to its Terms of Reference, the Commission is responsible for, but not limited to

- 7.1.1 studying and evaluating current social and bioethical questions in the light of the Scriptures and the Confessions of the Church;
- 7.1.2 obtaining reports of any social and bioethical questions, if deemed desirable, from boards, councils, commissions and committees of the Church directly involved in such questions, and in general to maintain liaison with such bodies; and

- 7.1.3 developing statements, opinions and other suitable resources for dissemination in the Church with the approval of the College of Bishops and, as necessary, to forward submissions to appropriate secular bodies.

The Commission also responds to requests from the College of Bishops for ethical guidance.

The Commission meets four times a year and undertakes much of its work through working groups, each having its own Terms of Reference approved by the Commission and/or GCB. The current list of working groups is:

- Lutherans for Life;
- Working Group for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence; and
- Lutheran Earth Care Australia and New Zealand (LECANZ).

ACHIEVEMENTS/RESULTS AGAINST PLAN

MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Stewardship of Creation/Environment (2015:0211)

Establishment of Lutheran EarthCare Australia and New Zealand (LECANZ)

The Commission, supported by Lutheran Education Australia (LEA) and Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS), submitted a proposal to General Synod in 2018 (2018:1802 2.2.10), to establish an EarthCare network across LECANZ to deliver the Synodical resolution of 2015.

- GCB approved the proposal of Lutheran EarthCare Australia and New Zealand (LECANZ) in August 2019 (19/125). Development of Terms of Reference and appointment of the Committee is complete. Met gender balance and younger person objectives.
- Priority placed on development of a Caring for Creation Policy for LECANZ and the development and oversight of a new website (see GCB 19/125).
- LECANZ Committee member (Rosa Hoff) has recently agreed to participate in a LWF Action for Climate Justice Forum in the region.

Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence (2015:0208/0209)

- Continued implementation of Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts (HHHH) program across LECANZ.
- The rollout of training for pastors hampered during 2020 by COVID-19 travel restrictions. Now developing online training modules for pastors, lay workers and other members of the LECANZ.
- LECANZ is now a partner in a research project seeking to understand family violence as it relates to the LECANZ and through the eyes of male perpetrators within the church. The Working Group is a reference group in the research project.
- The HHHH website is being updated as a continuing project. An edition of The Lutheran will also feature some articles.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2015:0212): carried forward

- A modified synod proposal (from 2018) was put to GCB by the Commission in conjunction with the Board for Local Mission. Its focus was an expansion of the successful Lutheran Community Care's New Home, New Community, New Hope program. This proposal was unsuccessful. The Commission is now establishing a working group across the LECANZ to identify appropriate action that could be taken by congregations to support refugees.

Abortion: carried forward

During this synodical term, significant effort has been made to review the opportunities that the church has to promote life as a means of engaging with the issue of abortion in Australia.

- Two papers were carried over from the previous Synodical Term.
- Two additional discussion papers prepared in 2019 and a summary paper outlining 5 key recommendations for church action were presented to CoB in October 2019.
- Action plan developed by Lutherans for Life (LFL) and presented to CoB in October 2020.
- The Commission has prioritised actions, delegating some tasks to LFL who will work collaboratively with LEA to develop resources suitable for use in secondary schools. Other actions rely on developing and/or promoting resources for use in congregational settings. The message is *Valuing Life in the LKANZ*.

COVID -19 Ethical Issues

- Following a request from Bishop Henderson in May 2020, a series of briefing papers were prepared by Commission members to address ethical issues related to COVID-19. These papers were distributed to CoB for use in their Districts as appropriate.
- Topics covered were: COVID-19 Medical Information; COVID-19 Vaccination; Impact on Mental Health; Impact on Domestic and Family Violence; and Impact on Refugees.

PROGRESS AGAINST APPROVED PLAN/OBJECTIVES

The Commission works in an advisory capacity to the College of Bishops. Work carried over from the previous Synodical term includes:

- the action to reduce rates of abortion
- the establishment of LECANZ
- the work of the Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts program and other planned actions of the Working group on Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions on travel, in second half of 2020, the Commission was unable to hold a full day workshop. COVID-19 travel restrictions also impacted the organised face to face training for Pastors for the Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts program by the Domestic and Family Violence Taskforce. This has required a move to online training modules being developed.

SUCCESSSES

- An exercise in understanding the role of the Commission and its interactions across LKANZ resulted in a Communications Framework - assists Commission members and other key groups, eg CTICR.
- The Commission has explored the relevance of the theology of the Two Kingdoms to its work, ably assisted by Rev Richard Haar (consultant ALC). To that end it is recommended that induction includes discussion of Rev Haar's *Diagram of the Ethical Model*.
- Establishing a direct link between the Commission and the working groups is important. A member of each working group should attend Workshops and/or one meeting annually.
- The Commission's interaction with CTICR has been fostered by online meetings of their respective Chairpersons and invitation to CTICR to attend the Commission's workshops.
- Provision of briefing papers for College of Bishops on COVID-19 ethical issues
- Inclusion of a person under the age of 35 on the LECANZ Committee
- LKANZ is a partner in a successful research application related to Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

- Need for improved induction/orientation process for new members.

- Using working groups to enable more rapid response to requests – however volunteers have many other commitments.
- The nature of the Commission’s work is that there is likely to be a wide spectrum of views and theological understandings. Recommendations of a working group may also challenge the views of some Commission members. Insufficient time during meetings to explore member experiences and philosophical positions. Written statements/short discussion papers from members as well as working groups may assist.
- Sought further advice in respect of theological understanding of the Lutheran teachings and influence of the Two Kingdoms on approaches to addressing ethical issues.
- Impact of COVID-19 on meeting face to face – greater reliance on online meetings.

RISKS

Major risks

Relationship risks: The Commission’s meetings ought to foster rigorous dialogue enabling diverse opinions on social and bioethical questions to be graciously shared, examined, understood and appreciated. Due to geographical distance, COVID travel restrictions and reliance on online meetings, the members have had less opportunity to establish relationships that can cope with the tension presented by the ideas discussed.

Likelihood of identified risks occurring and potential impact

Is occurring now and time to explore during meetings is not always available.

Action taken to mitigate risk

- Presence of consultants and specialists has assisted in providing a wider spectrum of views within the Commission to aid discussion.
- Used targeted short-term working groups to provide advice such as COVID-19 ethical issues and the influence of Two Kingdoms theology on ethical decision-making.

ALIGNMENT TO ‘OUR DIRECTION 2018–2024’

As we strive to faithfully search God’s word for direction on social and bioethical questions (1.1) we seek to provide guidance to help individuals to discern God’s will on the issues we wrestle with, so that they may Grow as God’s People. It is our hope that this will assist those we seek to resource to serve, with grace, the communities in which God has placed them (1.3). We also seek to protect and uphold the dignity of people, especially children and the vulnerable, to lead lives in peace and safety (1.3). Through our collaborative approach, we seek to integrate ethical decision-making into areas of ministry such as education (3.2.4) and to assist churchwide services to be more aware of and responsive to the differing needs of local communities (3.2.1).

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

- Assistant to the Bishop – Public Theology – consultation, liaison and support
- ALC – consultation on ethical decision-making
- LEA – partnering Lutherans for Life in actions to educate secondary students about abortion
- CTICR – Chairperson meetings; invitation to address CSBQ workshops
- Local Mission – support for refugees (Synod proposal)

FINANCE/BUDGET

GCB approved budget for Prevention of Domestic & Family Violence (PDFV) program and Lutheran EarthCare website. Financial expenditure relates to:

- Travel, accommodation & catering for member attendance at CSBQ workshops
- PDFV Working Group – Hidden Hurts, Healing Hearts program
- LECANZ Working Group – LECANZ website.

COMMISSION ON SOCIAL AND BIOETHICAL QUESTIONS**FINANCE REPORT**

	2020	2019	2018
Income	715	0	0
Expenditure	(28,041)	(31,295)	(96,718)
Grants allocated for year	27,326	31,638	91,515
Non cash transfers	0	(3,581)	(105)
Net result for year	<u>0</u>	<u>(3,238)</u>	<u>(5,308)</u>
Allocation against LCA accumulated funds	<u>0</u>	<u>(3,238)</u>	<u>(5,308)</u>