

AGENDA 3.4

LCA Bishop

1. INTRODUCTION

May our gracious God continue to flourish in you, the joy of salvation, as you share in the work of the gospel in your respective places of our church in New Zealand and Australia. The apostle Paul reminds us, 'But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us' (2 Corinthians 4).

As this is my first report for you as Bishop for our church in New Zealand and Australia, I want to express to you the immense privilege I feel, that I have been given the opportunity to oversee the hand of God at work in and through seemingly ordinary folk in everyday places across the communities of our Lutheran Church, caught up together in the mighty acts of God who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

This report is a brief supplement to the comprehensive report which Bishop John tabled in the Book of Reports for Convention of Synod published in 2021. I will not repeat material but will follow John's layout. I will also include some material that I have presented in reports to some District Conventions, as I highlight those things that we share together in various 'Churchwide' activities in the mission of God that is the LCA NZ.

2. THE CHURCH

2.1 THE LCA TODAY: DEMOGRAPHY

We are declining in the number of New Zealanders and Australians who identify themselves as people of the Lutheran Church. In the Australian Census, for example, we were listed at 1.2% of the population in 2011, then 0.7% in 2016 (approximately 174,000). We are also seeing an increase in the median age of the people of our church.

In the recent Australian National Church life Survey (NCLS) for the Lutheran Church, of the 7500 Lutherans who took part, 48% were over 70 years of age. Presentations from the NCLS this year have reported that on any regular Sunday, there is likely to be approximately 26,000 people attending Lutheran Church services in Australia and New Zealand.

These statistics invite us to ask, 'What is the Lord saying to his church?'

Executive Officer – Local Mission, Dr Tania Nelson, in collaboration with the bishops and mission directors of the church are providing strategies for the people in the communities of our church to study and apply the data from the NCLS and Census results. Two-thirds of our congregations are communities of under 100 people. If we do 'small church' well as Lutherans, then how can we help each other to do this better, with purposefulness? How do we properly collaborate in the mission of God with other Christian denominations on both sides of the Tasman?

2.2 WITH YOUTH IN MINISTRY

I enjoy pointing out to people that missionary George 'Muni' Schwarz was only 19 years old when he arrived to serve as pastor to the people of Cape Bedford, now Hopevale. He remained there for 55 years, with a lasting impact on the Christian witness and service of the Indigenous First Nations peoples around Cooktown in Far North Queensland.

We have many passionate young women and men in our contemporary Lutheran communities, and we are faced with the challenge not simply to minister to them, to guide their walk in the grace of their baptism, but also how to minister with them, so that they might actively participate, like Muni, in the wider mission of God.

Please pray for our young people and as you have opportunity encourage them in their witness and service. You might also ask young people what they think about the church and what they see the church of the future looking like.

2.3 THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND MEN

Throughout 2022, the GCB has been working with the College of Bishops to ensure that the church is prepared to consider the six proposals before the in-person sessions of the Convention of General Synod in 2023, addressing the question of whether men or women or only men are to be ordained to the Office of the Public Ministry. This work has included the convening of 'town hall' sessions to consider the proposals and how they are addressed by delegates at Convention.

In May, the College of Bishops placed the following consideration before a joint meeting of CoB and GCB:

'The bishops lament the ongoing division in our church exhibited by the Synod debates throughout the 21st century on the question regarding who can be ordained to the office of the public ministry. As bishops, we are called to oversight in the church. We have prayerfully sought the Lord's guidance and have discerned how we must express our leadership. We urge that the agenda of Synod 2023 must include proposals on the matter of ordination which do not continue debate which leaves us divided. Rather, we need to consider a godly way to collegially participate in the mission God has given us.'

May the Lord guide his people as we seek his good and gracious will for his church. In concluding remarks in the church's 1992 booklet on 'Women and the ministry', Drs Weiss and Leske gave us encouragement for our 2023 convention, when they wrote, 'We pray that God's Spirit will bless our discussions, preserve us in unity and harmony as we engage in debate, and guide us into a clear consensus on this challenging issue'.

2.4 SUPPLY OF CHURCH WORKERS

Together let us ask the Lord to raise up workers for the harvest.

By 2030 we expect that half of our active pastors will have retired. Currently the LCA NZ has 239 pastors in active ministry. Seventeen are serving as Specific Ministry Pastors, and there are 15 Aboriginal pastors. Across the church there are 65 Lutheran communities seeking a pastor to serve among them. In addition, parishes, schools and church agencies are also facing a critical situation regarding trained church workers being available to serve for the ministries of the church.

The May 2022 meeting of the College of Bishops, our District bishops included a full-day meeting with District mission directors, Pastor James Winderlich (Principal of Australian Lutheran College), Dr Tania Nelson (Executive Office for Local Mission), Pastor Neville Otto (LCA NZ Assistant Bishop) and me.

The focus of the meeting was the issue of the supply of church workers for this mission and ministry of the LCANZ, and the outcomes have been reported elsewhere. The GCB has appointed Bishop Emeritus Greg Pietsch to oversee the outcomes of the May workshop, with a view to any relevant proposals brought to the church in synod in 2024.

The three key priorities which emerged from the conversations are:

1. Pathways: developing pathways for specific ministries, such as pastor or chaplain, including specific pathways for ministries in schools and aged care, and church planting.
2. Regionalising: developing regional collaboration to determine how local areas work together for the provision of word and sacrament ministry in the mission God gives us.
3. Ordering Ministry: establishing clear language for how we understand the ordering of ministry among us, including what we understand to be flexible. This includes engaging with the CTICR.

The priority for Greg is consultation with people and the communities of the Church here and in New Zealand, with a view to bringing recommendations to the 2024 General Convention of Synod.

2.5 LUTHERAN SCHOOLS IN THE MISSION OF GOD

In the six months prior to relocating to Adelaide to begin as the bishop of our church, I served in an interim role as the senior college pastor at St Peters Lutheran College in Indooroopilly, Queensland.

I thank God for the opportunity to serve in the church in this wonderful Lutheran school community, which has been such blessing to my own life. It was a joy to serve with the college's faithful Christian principal, Tim Kotzur.

In November that year, I sat with a member of the college's Parents and Friends group, reflecting on his voluntary work at the college. Not a Lutheran himself, this college parent reflected on his choice of St Peters Lutheran College for his child's education. He welcomed the college's witness to Christian faith and highlighted the pastoral community amid educational disciplines based on carefully articulated principles. He cherished a Lutheran school as something good for his family and he gives hours and hours to the community life of the college, eager to promote St Peters as a school of the Lutheran Church.

Our Lutheran Church impacts on the lives of thousands of Australian families through our Lutheran schools and early childhood services. We are blessed with faithful principals and school leaders, who are passionate educators influencing teaching and learning both at home and abroad. We have a challenge before us, to continually ask what the Lord is doing in and through our Lutheran schools and early childhood services. Please pray for these communities of our church as they serve young people and their families.

3. INDIGENOUS LUTHERANS IN THE CENTRE

I was privileged to have Pastors Simon Dixon and Roderick Kantamara, from the Finke River Lutheran communities in Central Australia, formally participating in my installation as the bishop of our church. Women of the Ntaria choir of Hermannsburg were unable to be present on account of COVID restrictions but were able to provide video recording of their songs. Rosalind Coleman, local South Australian Christian woman of the Kurna Peoples, also attended to present the Welcome to Country.

The Lutheran Church in Australia and New Zealand includes significant populations of members from our Indigenous First Nations peoples, particularly in South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. In his report to Convention, Bishop John highlighted the church's

Reconciliation Action Plan. I commend this ongoing work to each of the parish communities and the agencies of our Lutheran Church, so that we would promote respectful and supportive relationships between our Indigenous First Nations people and those who have arrived on these shores since 1788.

A highlight in 2023 will be the 50th Anniversary of Yirara College in Alice Springs, planned for the end of July.

In 2022, the Finke River Mission Board farewelled its long-serving chairperson, Tim Stollznow, who has stepped down due to business obligations. Current board member, Chris Guntner, has been appointed to serve as the acting chair for the board.

Our Lutheran Church has been blessed with the participation of so many diverse Aboriginal Lutheran communities who have much to teach the rest of our nation in the matters of reconciliation and cooperation. I cherish the image given to us by Pastor George Rosendale of Hopevale in Far North Queensland. A Christian sees with the eyes of God. Those eyes are 'colour blind' when it comes to skin colour. Please pray that our Lutheran witness with and for Indigenous First Nations peoples would continue to flourish.

4. AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

The Board of Australian Lutheran College developed its strategic plan, and this work summarised in the document 'Towards 2028: Our Strategic Direction' has been published, upon being endorsed by our General Church Board in February this year. It is available online.

When I entered the seminary in 1980, the theological program of our church included Lutheran Teachers College/Lay Training Centre on Ward Street and Luther Seminary on Jeffcott Street in North Adelaide. Any visitor to the seminary at dinner time during the academic term would encounter almost 200 young women and men training for ministries in the church. The campus also included some students undertaking other tertiary studies, many of whom are active in church leadership today.

In 2022 there is only a fraction of that community remaining with fewer than a dozen full-time students on campus. The refectory and boarding house are closed. Only three young men have been approved for ordination, with only two in the cohort for 2023.

This requires the ALC Board to determine how best to serve the church. This has included changing its staffing levels for both ordained and lay staff members. This also impacts on our church's capacity to provide support for our international mission partnerships.

ALC is the tertiary education institution of our church, committed to its charter to train pastors, teachers and other church workers for the LCANZ. Please pray for Principal James Winderlich and ALC staff members, our leaders in the theological education programs of our church.

5. INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

In August 2022 I travelled with Pastor Matt Anker, Assistant to the Bishop – International Mission, to visit with the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP). We were warmly welcomed and Pastor Matt has brought back to the Committee for International Mission matters for potential mission collaboration with our sisters and brothers in the LCP.

In September, Pastor Matt and I travelled to Kisumu in Kenya to join with over 50 church leaders attending the 27th Annual Conference of the International Lutheran Council (ILC). The conference's theme was 'Liturgy and Culture: how worship shapes our life together and why we

do what we do'. A key matter at this conference was a joint paper between the ILC and the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). The conference will recommend that further theological work be done.

In October 2023, representatives of our church will be attending the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Thirteenth General Assembly in Poland, under the theme 'One Body, One Spirit, One Hope'.

5.1 THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN CONFERENCE MOTION REGARDING FULL MEMBERSHIP

In the 2018 General Synod, the Holy Cross Belconnen Congregation in Belconnen in the NSW and ACT District brought two proposals which have been combined and have now been placed before the 2023 General Convention as Proposal 2.2.6:

LCANZ to seek full membership of LWF and ILC

PROPOSED MOTION Submitted by Belconnen Holy Cross Congregation

PROPOSED THAT the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand becomes a full member of both the Lutheran World Federation and of the International Lutheran Council.

A significant number of Lutheran churches are full members of both international Lutheran organisations (ILC and LWF). These include the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the Malagasy Lutheran Church (Madagascar), the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Japan Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in Korea, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia and the Ceylon Evangelical Lutheran Church.

GCB asked CTICR to investigate the theology of this proposal and the CTICR has now closed its investigation with no advice, opinion or recommendation.

1. The example of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (LCP)

In my August 2022 visit to the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, I was able to learn more of the way it operates with full membership in both the International Lutheran Council and the Lutheran World Federation.

The LCP was founded as a mission of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in 1946 and has grown to be a Church of approximately 35 000 members across 4 Districts. In 1973, the LCP resolved to join the LWF as a full member. The LCP was also admitted to full membership of the ILC at the foundation of the ILC in 1993. Currently, the President of the LCP, Revd Antonio del Rio Reyes serves as the Asia Region Leader for the ILC and he attends the ILC World Conferences and other ILC gatherings. The LCP is active in regional LWF work, including mission partnerships with neighbouring LWF community Churches such as the ELCPNG and the Singapore Lutheran Church. Neither the LWF nor the ILC has formally recommended to the LCP that membership in one is not compatible with membership in the other. Currently, there is no church-wide movement in the LCP to take any particular action regarding leaving the LWF or leaving the ILC.

2. Commonalities and divergences between the LCP and the LCANZ

- 1.1 The LCP and LCANZ share a common overall population of active members – approximately 35,000.
- 2.2 The LCP and LCANZ both keep the 'Galesburg Rule' central to the practice of church fellowships. From our LCANZ Model Constitution we state: 'Lutheran pulpits are for Lutheran pastors only; Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants only. Any

exception to the application of this principle belongs to the sphere of privilege, not of right'.

- 2.3 The LCP has very few institutions and receives no government funding for its ministries. The LCP has a much lower median age of members (and pastors) than the LKANZ has.
- 2.4 The LCP is divided into four Districts each with a District president much like the LKANZ.
- 2.5 The LCP does not currently ordain women to the office of the public ministry and is not currently discussing any proposals in this regard.
- 2.6 The LCP welcomes the exploration of a closer altar and pulpit relationship with the LKANZ.

3. Some key issues from the example of the LCP for the LKANZ consideration of full membership in the LWF and the ILC

- 3.1 The LCP is evidence of a Lutheran church in our region which retains full membership in both the ILC and LWF thereby showing that the LCP is able to participate in both Lutheran organisations in the way described in the Holy Cross Belconnen proposal to General Synod.
- 3.2 The LWF can be approached to ask if the LKANZ could be welcomed into full membership in the form of 'emerging communion' practised by the LCP. This means that there is not a 'full communion' of altar and pulpit fellowship, but a full participation in the collaborative activities of the LWF while maintaining the LKANZ's local theological and historical culture of the Galesburg Rule.
- 3.3 LWF Current Strategy 6.1 declares that the LWF is committed to: 'Jointly develop theological reflection that articulates our understanding of being Lutheran churches in communion: We will further develop a shared understanding of the theological identity of LWF member churches through which they will continue recognising each other, belonging to the communion, while witnessing in their diverse contexts'. And to "Live out the communion relationships among member churches: We will further clarify and define our common understanding, structures, and the praxis supporting churches as they express their call to live in communion; We will provide accompaniment and support encounter and theological discernment to understand and address differences and conflict in the communion.'
- 3.4 How would the ILC respond if the LKANZ introduced the practice of ordaining women to the office of the public ministry?
- 3.5 How would the ILC respond if the LKANZ were to become a full member of the LWF?
- 3.6 The LWF Constitution speaks of 'Full Communion': Constitution Section III: NATURE AND FUNCTIONS: 'The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.'
- 3.7 How would the LWF respond if the LKANZ were to become a full member of the ILC?
- 3.8 The LWF does not confess with the LKANZ, all the writings of the Book of Concord of 1580: 'The Lutheran World Federation confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. It sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God.'
- 3.9 How do the principles of Thesis I and Thesis II of the Theses of Agreement apply to full membership in the LWF?
- 3.10 How will the LWF respond to the concern that full member churches are pressured into ordaining women?
- 3.11 Would the LWF accept the LKANZ's practice of colloquising visiting pastors and theologians?

Finally, the 2022 General Pastors Conference in Tanunda welcomed the reconvening of a gathering of representatives of the ILC and the LWF with LCA NZ representatives to address the issues of full membership. A meeting had been planned in 2021 but was not held due to COVID restrictions.

3. LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

3.1 CHURCHWIDE OFFICE

We welcome Brett Hausler to his role as Executive Officer of the Church. Brett and I both began our service in the Churchwide Office in January 2022. Brett has relocated to Adelaide from his hometown of Melbourne in Victoria where he was well-known to the people of the St Paul's Lutheran Church, Box Hill community. His experience of Church and of the corporate world has enabled Brett to give robust guidance for our Churchwide Office and the General Church Board in the operations of being Church. He has worked hard to be present in the field, attending as many District Conventions as he has been able to. Please pray for Brett in this new role. It is certain that he understands his work as EoC to be his vocation as a Christian servant.

3.2 THE COLLEGE OF BISHOPS (COB)

The Lord has blessed our church with faithful witnesses in the Office of Bishop: Mark serving in New Zealand; Mike serving in Western Australia; David serving in South Australia and the Northern Territory; Lester serving in Victoria Tasmania; Robert serving in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory; Mark serving in Queensland; and Neville serving as Assistant Bishop of the LCA NZ. These men are passionately committed to the mission of God in which we all serve.

Each is deeply aware of his own frailties and 'thorns in the flesh'. Each is eager to collaborate with sisters and brothers around them. Please pray for each of them with their office of oversight in their respective places. In your praying, please include particular prayers for our bishops who are concluding their work in 2023: Bishop Mark in the LCA NZ, Bishop Mike in LCA WA and Bishop David in LCA SA NT.

I also wish to especially acknowledge the legacy of leadership given to me by our remaining past Churchwide leaders: President Emeritus Mike Semmler and Bishop Emeritus John Henderson. These two men have faithfully followed where the Lord has been leading as they continue to offer their gifts in the cause of the gospel. God bless Mike and John in these well-earned years of retirement.

4. IN MISSION

Let me conclude with a word of encouragement from Dr Lance Steicke, past president of the LCA NZ who was called home to his Saviour's side during this synodical term. Just prior to the 1997 Convention of General Synod, Dr Steicke was recorded for a video, which was distributed to the church to prepare people for the coming Convention.

In that recording, he said:

'If the first 30 years have been exciting, and there have been some challenges, I believe the years immediately ahead of us will be more exciting and present even greater challenges. I envisage the church will be one that emphasises mission all the more, that emphasises the

need to reach out to people with the great good news of Jesus Christ – sharing what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to be a Lutheran Christian in this country ... The challenge for our church is an exciting one and a demanding one, but one which is placed into our lap by the Lord himself. He has called us to be his people – people who he has placed us as his people in this our church and he wants us to be his people by sharing his good news of who he is and what he has done for us in Jesus Christ – for the people of our church, of our country, of our world.'

To the glory of God

Pastor Paul Smith

Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand