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**Communiqué 4**

**Review of the LCA/NZ Constitution – Phase 1**

**Guiding Principles for a 21st Century LCA/NZ**

**Phase 1 of our half-century Constitutional Review**

15 July 2020

**A message to all members, bodies and agencies of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand**

The peace of the Lord be with you all.

I’m writing once again to update you on the Review of the LCA/NZ Constitution which the General Church Board (GCB) is conducting on behalf of our General Synod. We need a constitution that serves us well in being faithful to Christ, living out the gospel and thriving in this 21st century. Of course, the article on Confessional is not up for review, as it expresses our core belief in Scripture and Confession. Our confession is the base from which all our structures, organization and activities flow.

In this fourth communiqué, I’m pleased to report that the consultation process continues to go well. We are taking things slowly, so that the consultation can be as widespread as possible.

# Process update:

* Three volunteer ‘Issues Analysis Groups’ (IAGs) have completed their initial tasks and contributed reports to the Review. A fourth group of volunteers is about to begin work as a ‘Legal & Compliance’ IAG.
* Results from the church-member survey, the young persons survey and individual submissions have undergone a preliminary analysis.
* The facilitator has continued to collate information provided to the Review and follow-up on specific matters with groups within the LCA.
* The Review Team, consisting of GCB and District nominees, met again by teleconference in May and at the beginning of July.
* We conducted a ‘Key Representatives’ video-conference (Bishops and representatives from GCB, Districts, and the LCA Standing Committee on Constitutions) on 25 May.
* Bishops, as a group, have now engaged with the Review on three occasions.

# Preliminary Review results to date

A small number of church members said they couldn’t see any reason for updating the current constitution. A few said the constitution is so broken and ‘out of date’ it should be thrown away and completely rewritten. Most respondents, however, said the content of the current constitutional is mostly fine but insufficient, and the document needs a major ‘clean up’.

To date, the church-member survey, the young persons survey and submissions received have identified several constitutional ‘clean up’ issues.

Church members said they would like the constitution:

* to be better organised and easier to read for the lay person;
* to have the lack of clarity and seeming contradictions in the current version removed, for example, by including definitions of key terms;
* to be more than just a legal document – they’d like a document to inspire them and that they could be proud of;
* to better highlight the primacy of Christ as Lord and head of the church (and not wait until clause 6.1 on page 4 to mention this);
* to bring the definition of ‘membership’ in congregations better in line with what is now typical practice in our church;
* to better highlight the importance of focussing on supporting local congregations and other LCA/NZ faith communities;
* to acknowledge the increasingly multicultural nature of our church and the new forms of ministry that better meet the needs of culturally diverse communities and young people;
* to give more recognition to the important relationships between our separate general and district Synods so they can work together better;
* to have a name for the church that is more inclusive of our New Zealand brothers and sisters.

Some other constitution-related matters raised by church members in the Review have to do with things such as: the wording and/or ordering of our Objects; Synod delegate nomination processes; how to better listen to and engage with young people; how to better include Indigenous, cross-cultural and youth ‘voices’ in the decision making forums of the church; the need to reduce costs at district and general church levels; the need to improve some of our governance (stewardship) practices and processes which may no longer meet modern standards of good governance; and what the future legal document format of the constitution should be (an ‘Associations’ format or the ‘Company’ format such as ALC has).

The Reviewer has also received feedback that we, as a church, need to talk more about our theology and practices (e.g. the ordination of women). Those matters, however, are outside the scope of this Review.

To date, most of respondents have indicated that we should not change any of the ‘powers and authorities’ outlined in our existing constitution or change the type of structures within our church (e.g. Synods, Districts etc). While we do need to look at the costs of operating our structures and ministries, that matter is also outside the scope of this Review.

# Next steps in this review

I encourage you, when the Summary Interim Report is released in late August 2020, to read it and discuss the findings in your congregations and church agencies. I encourage all congregations and local church agencies to join in the discussions that your district will organise during September/October 2020. Districts will collect feedback from their geographic area and provide church member thoughts to the Review Team. (Churchwide agencies and bodies will be able to provide feedback to the Churchwide Office).

I’m confident that together we will find agreement as to what we should propose to the next Convention of General Synod on how best to improve our current constitution for our ongoing journey into the 21st Century.

The next steps in the Review will be:

1. Further analysis of the surveys and submissions,
2. Preparation of an Interim Report by the Reviewer and a Summary Interim Report – both planned for release in late August 2020,
3. Ongoing work by the volunteer Legal & Compliance Issues Analysis Group, and
4. Church member discussions within districts and at the churchwide level in September and October in order to capture church member feedback about the Interim Report.

**To find out more** about this Review (including Communiqués 1 to 3), go to the [Review webpage](http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lca.org.au%2Fconstitution-review&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNFuTRkd3jCEvVzVEWQJ1hVxtCTmxA).

If you have questions about the Review, please contact Peter Schirmer, Executive Officer of the Church at peter.schirmer@lca.org.au

Yours in Christ,

Pastor John Henderson

Bishop

Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand