



LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA VICTORIA/TASMANIA DISTRICT

where love comes to life

Christmas Newsletter

Dear pastors and congregations,

My prayers go with you as you prepare to worship and gather together during what is remaining of Advent and over the Christmas. Most of us are communing with each other regularly for the first time in months. That has special significance as we lift our hearts in praise of the Son of God who came to 'commune' with fallen humanity in the person of Jesus.

My greetings to you as you prepare to celebrate the wonders of your Saviour's birth with your families, and hopefully as you take a break after Christmas.

I wish to draw your attention to a few things.

Christmas Sermon

I am making available a sermon manuscript for use across the District during lay led services in the absence of a pastor, either due to a pastoral vacancy, or to a pastor taking leave immediately after Christmas. Download the Sermon [HERE](#)

Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill

Thank you to pastors and laypeople who have asked about our response to the 'Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill,' which was introduced into state parliament late in November. I will fill you in on what information I have to date.

Late in 2018 there had been some community consultation on a proposed bill. A representative from our District Ecumenical Advisory Committee attended a consultation with government officials and highlighted concerns with the proposal – although the bill was not presented in its final form. At that time also, Nick Schwarz, the assistant to the LCA Bishop in the area of public theology made some notes to feed into that discussion based on research he had done.

The introduction of the Bill in late November 2020 for discussion and a vote in the lower house of parliament during the week of 7-11 December, left little time for people to respond. There had been no further consultation prior to that time.

Groups like Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) and Freedom for Faith circulated commentary expressing concerns about aspects of the bill, urging people to write to their members of parliament. You can read some of the commentary on the ACL website (www.acl.org.au) and Freedom for Faith ([Labor Government in Victoria Makes Prayer A Criminal Offence – Freedom For Faith](#)).

Victorian Heads of Churches met on Wednesday 9 December and formulated a response to parliament along these lines: The leaders supported the intention of the legislation if it is to protect vulnerable people from coercive practices. However, they also expressed concern over aspects of the legislation in its current form, and in particular, the speed at which that legislation has been brought to parliament, limiting the opportunity for wider community consultation. Some leaders felt they had not been afforded adequate time to consider implications for the expression of prayer and religious faith, and to engage with parliamentary representative on these matters. The lack of clear definitions and clear articulation of what is or is not considered a harmful or suppressive practice has led to a significant level of concern as to the administration of the Act. The Leaders asked that consideration be given to delaying a vote on the Bill to such time as the concerns of faith communities of Victoria can be adequately addressed.

With widespread support across the parties, the Bill passed the lower house this week with a vote scheduled for the upper house in March 2021. Some information on the state of play, and what you can do about it, is available at the following link:

<https://email.createsend.com.au/t/ViewEmail/r/3A188062DD660ED12540EF23F30FEDED/AA4B0EA2DD6E5A2AE663AB054A538FBA> . On that page, there is another link to write to your member of parliament about your concerns. Please make this available to your members.

Leave and District Office Closure

District Office will close over the period of 18 December to 11 January and I will be on leave until the following week, returning on the 18th January 2021.

During this time Pr Gordon Wegener has been appointed the Acting Bishop.

Something to think about

From what I have read and from experience across the church, the pandemic and its lockdowns have left congregations and pastors facing many challenges, concerns and conflicts. We may not even be conscious of the way that our isolation from others has affected us, and how much more prone we may be to temptation as a result.

A few weeks ago, I read a quote from Martin Luther, based on the Scripture, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Instead of focusing on the blessings of Jesus' presence in our togetherness, Luther focusses on the temptations we face in our 'aloneness'. He writes:

"More sins - and more serious sins - are committed when people are alone, than when they are in the company of others. I myself know from experience that I never fall into more sins than when I am alone. When you are alone, something is more liable to prey on your mind. And if something horrible has happened, then we will think about it more and more obsessively, making it bigger and worse than it really is. We think that nobody is more unfortunate than we are and imagine that our life and our affairs are going to come to a bad end. In summa: when we are alone, we have wild and queer thoughts and always see a thing as being much worse than it really is, in our belief that other people are much happier than we are, and it hurts us greatly that they prosper, whilst we are in distress and in every kind of need."

The challenge for each of us at this time, pastors and people, is to be very conscious of our own feelings and reactions and understanding of how or why others may be acting the way they are. This calls for self-awareness, patience, understanding and forgiveness, especially as we interact with others.

The District Office staff and I keep you and your congregations and schools in prayer as we conclude the unusual year that 2020 has been, and look forward to God's grace and blessing in 2021.

Yours in Christ



Rev Lester Priebbenow
LCA Bishop – Victoria and Tasmania