

Report to General Pastors Conference – LCA Bishop

July 2015

1. Introduction

*Your works, not mine, O Christ,
speak gladness to this heart;
they tell me all is done;
they bid my fear depart.
To whom save you,
who can alone
for sin atone,
Lord, can I go?*

*Your wounds, not mine, O Christ,
can heal my hurting soul;
the suffering that you bore
can soothe and make me whole.
To whom save you,
who can alone
for sin atone,
Lord, can I go?*

*Your cross, not mine, O Christ,
has borne the awful load
of sins that none could bear
but the incarnate God.
To whom save you,
who can alone
for sin atone,
Lord, can I go?*

*Your death, not mine, O Christ,
has paid the ransom due;
ten thousand deaths like mine
would have been all too few.
To whom save you,
who can alone
for sin atone,
Lord, can I go?*

*Your righteousness, O Christ,
alone can cover me;
no righteousness avails,
but yours, eternally.
To whom save you,
who can alone
for sin atone,
Lord, can I go?*

Horatius Bonar 1808-89, alt.
LHS 332

1 My local congregation sang this hymn last Sunday to accompany the Gospel reading of Mark 5:21-
2 43. It is one of the hymns recommended by the LCA Worship Resources for the 5th Sunday after
3 Pentecost, and so maybe you sang it too. It's a simple Christ centred song and it says most of the
4 things I would like to say to you as pastors of the LCA at this Conference. Every verse begins with
5 Christ, and directs us back to Christ. As pastors of the evangelical Lutheran Church, that's a faith we
6 should cultivate privately and demonstrate publicly in our preaching, teaching, and care of souls.

7 This song does not present a complete Christian theology or spirituality, but it does present the one
8 thing we need.¹ These days many Christians complain about the concept of substitutionary
9 atonement and argue against it as being too anthropocentric. Ultimately we must accept that only
10 God has the whole truth, and there is always more than we can know or understand. What we do
11 know is that God's Word of promise makes us certain that he gave his life for us in Christ. Above
12 anything else we might think we know, guess, or read about God and his work, Lutheran pastors
13 confess and believe that '... for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven...'

14 It is significant that the Book of Concord begins, not with Lutheran writings, but with the Three Chief
15 Symbols of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These ecumenical
16 Trinitarian Creeds remain the first lens through which we read Scripture. In the English text of the
17 Nicene Creed, 129 words out of 222 are devoted to the Doctrine of the Incarnation. The Apostles'
18 Creed emphasises the second person of the Trinity even more, with a ratio of 70/110. There are
19 many religions which speak of god and gods and spiritual things. Only Christianity confesses the
20 incarnate God, who chooses to let us know him by name and by nature.

¹ Luke 10:41-42

2. The Pastoral Ministry

1 First, I want to thank you for your dedication and commitment to the ministry of the gospel. I
2 am aware of the continuing faithfulness of our pastorate, and the extraordinary community we
3 are. I discover this by attending many District Pastors Conferences, and participating in events
4 where pastors are major contributors. I am often moved by the perceptive and aware thinking
5 you demonstrate, and the loyalty with which you stick with your vows and continue to serve. I
6 am conscious of the many that minister quietly, week by week, day by day, without making a
7 fuss. I see the variety of human beings that God has gathered together in the ministry of the
8 LCA, and I am deeply appreciative. Yes, occasionally we grate with each other and bump up
9 against obstacles, but generally our cohesiveness, compassion, and intelligence shines through.

10 Being Bishop of the LCA as outlined in the By-Laws of the Church VIII B is quite a daunting task.
11 My personal performance against these requirements is currently under review. 10% of you are
12 being included in that review. If you are part of that 10% you will have received a survey form to
13 complete, and I encourage you to use it.

14 I mention this in my report because as Bishop I am a member of the pastoral ministry just as
15 you are, and therefore subject to the oversight of the Church. It is LCA policy to review the
16 Bishop once per Synodical term. The review is likely to tell me things that I would rather not
17 hear. Some of them might be theological and doctrinal, and some of them behavioural or
18 procedural. Some might even be personal. If Christ is to be the centre, and if I am to serve you
19 with whatever gifts God has given me, I need to hear these things. We each must be open to
20 receiving proper feedback from those we serve. In your Call letter your people have asked that
21 you will *'assist (us) in regular evaluation of the ministry and mission of the parish, including your
22 own role in that ministry and mission'*.

23 Under normal circumstances, if you have comments, complaints, or compliments about the LCA
24 and how it works, please first contact your District Bishop. The LCA Bishop's ministry is mainly
25 conducted *'in association with or through the respective Bishops of the Districts'* (LCA By-Laws).
26 That way we keep order in the Church, avoid 'triangulation', and if you need to elevate your
27 concern (or your compliment!) a level further, there is still somewhere for you to go.

28 Occasionally you may have a remark about something I have written or said publicly. On those
29 matters, of course, you can write directly to bishop@lca.org.au.

2.1. The ministry of Word and Sacrament

30 *The New Testament ministry is the office instituted by Christ for the public administration*
31 *of the means of grace, that is, the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the*
32 *Sacraments, through which as through instruments the Holy Ghost works saving faith in*
33 *the hearts of men.* (TA VI 1 Office of the Ministry)

34 Theologically, the LCA does not separate the ordained ministry from the *preaching of the*
35 *Gospel and the administering of the Sacraments*. These are more than functions, or even
36 the primary functions, of the ministry. They are its essence. A pastor's primary
37 responsibility is to handle the means of grace.

38 As our Church and the Pastoral role become increasingly complex, we can get excited
39 about many ministry options. Occasionally these can distract us from our main calling.
40 Bishops regularly receive requests for pastors to be deployed in positions which have no
41 reference to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Sometimes this is for reasons of
42 perceived 'status' or 'authority'. Organisations claim that unless a pastor is involved they
43 will be largely ignored. I know that many of us are highly skilled operatives, but I pray this
44 trend does not mean that we regard the preaching of the Word and the administration of
45 the Sacraments as some kind of secondary activity. It is always front and centre.

2.2. The care of souls

1 The Congregational Letter of Call after setting out the duties of preaching, teaching, and
2 worship, asks the pastor to *'guard and promote faithfully our spiritual welfare, to this end*
3 *exercising spiritual oversight over us and ministering to us according to our particular*
4 *needs...'* Fulfilling this duty means keeping in regular contact with those for whom you
5 care. While it varies according to congregational size and complexity, a Lutheran pastor is
6 not to remain apart from the people he serves. Whether it is done through home
7 visitation, attendance at guilds and auxiliaries, attendance on the school grounds, of
8 doing the rounds of an aged care home or some other interaction, it remains an
9 important and essential part of being a pastor. It means not always being the speaker,
10 but more frequently a listener.

11 *"We offer ourselves, one way or another, to try to work for God. We want, as it were, to*
12 *be among the sheep dogs employed by the Lord Shepherd. Have you ever watched a good*
13 *sheep dog at work? He is not an emotional animal. He goes on with his job quite steadily;*
14 *takes no notice of bad weather, rough ground or of his own comfort. He seldom or never*
15 *stops to be stroked. Yet his faithfulness and intimate communion with his master are of*
16 *the loveliest things in the world. Now and then he looks at the shepherd. And when the*
17 *time comes for rest, they are generally to be found together. Let this be the model of your*
18 *love."* Evelyn Underhill quoted by John W Doberstein, *The Minister's Prayer Book*,
19 (London & Glasgow: Collins, 1964) p. 356.

2.3. Project on the Pastoral Ministry of the LCA

20 Last year the College of Bishops resolved to conduct a survey of the pastoral ministry. It
21 applied to the LLL and received a grant to undertake this work. In a way, this will be a
22 kind of 50th anniversary present for the Church. 2016 will mark 50 years since we became
23 one ministry, and 48 years since the two seminaries joined to form Luther Seminary in
24 North Adelaide.

25 By now each of you should have received the survey material. You will have read that the
26 study focusses on six² specific areas, with each area of focus composing a separate sub-
27 study:

- 28 (1) the nature and tasks of pastoral ministry in the LCA;
- 29 (2) clergy well-being;
- 30 (3) LCA clergy and ministry with and to Lutheran Schools;
- 31 (4) the call process;
- 32 (5) the initial training and the ongoing professional development of clergy; and
- 33 (6) pastoral oversight and management.

34 The study will provide the College of Bishops and other key decision-makers in the LCA
35 with accurate and up-to-date information about the shape, strengths, weaknesses,
36 expectations, wellbeing, training, etc. of current Lutheran clergy as well as a projection of
37 likely trends and needs into the future. The study will allow key leaders to make informed
38 decisions about pastoral training, oversight, keeping of lists, management of church-
39 school relationships, clergy - lay ministry relationships, recruitment of new clergy,
40 provision of professional development, and so on.

2.4. The right to use the title 'Pastor'

41 In 1974 the LCA adopted a policy on the 'Right to use the title Pastor'. You can find it in
42 your copy of Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions, or online at

² There were originally 5 areas of study, and a 6th was later added.

1 <http://www.lca.org.au/doctrinal-statements--theological-opinions-2.html> under section
2 D Ministries in the Church.

3 I mention this policy as a reminder that the title 'Pastor' is not an indelible one that
4 automatically goes with you for life, whatever your vocation. For us the title is used in
5 recognition of being *rightly called* according to the regulations and rites of the church. In
6 other words, it doesn't go with the person, but the job.

7 When a pastor takes up a position inside or outside the Church which is not under a Call
8 of the Church, and for which a secondment arrangement has not been made, this
9 becomes a grey area. Popular piety among lay people will still cause him to be called
10 'Pastor', and very often this is continued in publications and other media.

11 The policy also reminds us that an emeritus pastor means one '*who has served out his*
12 *time; he is retired from long and active service*'. An emeritus pastor retains the right to
13 use the title under a special call of the District in which he lives.

14 A 1977 amendment creates a shorthand version of all this by stating: "All pastors whose
15 names are on the official 'Roll of Pastors' of the Lutheran Church of Australia are entitled
16 to be called 'Pastor'."

2.5. Specific Ministry Pastors

17 Specific Ministry Pastors operate under a special set of rules under which a call is limited
18 by place and time. An SMP has not normally submitted to a period of intensive
19 theological training. Consequently, although there is only one order of the ministry, SMPs
20 are not generally 'portable'. When he is no longer under an active call, he is technically no
21 longer a pastor. All SMPs are aware of this situation before ordination, but this separate
22 treatment can appear to be unfair. As the number and scope of SMP ministries is
23 increasing people are asking challenging questions about the ordering of the ministry
24 which we, as a Church, will have to face.

25 I am thankful to the Pastoral Theology staff at Australian Lutheran College for the manner
26 in which they willingly provide Biblical and homiletical training for SMPs several times a
27 year. In 2015 we have taken the unusual step of suspending that training to allow as
28 many SMPs to attend this Pastors Conference and the upcoming Convention as possible.
29 Funds usually put into the training program have been diverted for this purpose. While
30 SMPs cannot vote or act as delegates, all of us need to hear your voices as you are so very
31 often at the coalface of the ministries in which we need to grow.

2.6. Theses on the Ministry

32 At some stage or other you will all have studied the Theses on the Ministry (TA VI) which
33 explain how the LCA understands the ordained ministry. I have already referred to this
34 document in 2.1

35 The Church's debate on ordination has brought to light an apparent ignorance of these
36 Theses in some, and perhaps many, parts of the LCA. When asked to read them as part of
37 the Ordination Dialogue, lay people have written in to say that they find the Theses
38 incomprehensible. They can't read them. People are requesting a 'plain English' version,
39 much like you might in the case of a will or legal contract.

40 Emeritus pastor Rick Zweck, despite his illness, volunteered to have a go at preparing a
41 [paraphrase of TA VI](#). While not yet in its final form, I have attached a 'first cut' of this
42 document to my report. If you have suggestions for improvement, please don't go to Rick
43 direct, but contact me. We would like to be able to make it available to the Church well

1 before Convention, to assist people in understanding the stance of the LCA, and the
2 question that will be before us once again.

3. General Convention of Synod

3.1. Convention program – how it is different this time around

3 By now you will all know that the General Convention of Synod is to be held in Rochedale,
4 Qld, from the evening of Tuesday 29th September to the morning of Sunday 4th October. If
5 you have been following your correspondence, including eNews updates, The Lutheran,
6 and the LCA Website (<http://www.lcasynod.org.au>) you will be up to date.

7 While the two programs are not identical, in some ways this GPC meeting is a ‘test run’
8 for the Convention. We expect to learn things from this meeting which will help us
9 prepare for Convention. In part this will be the advice that GPC provides in session 9, but
10 it will also include the way in which you function in small groups, and the dynamic we
11 develop as a group in considering the issue. If you remember, part of our Conference in
12 2013 became tense, and the next day apologies were made. The Convention that
13 followed also took on a restless atmosphere from time to time. We would like to prevent
14 that situation from happening again.

15 This time there is a longer break between the two meetings than there has ever been
16 before. The purpose is to allow this GPC to formulate its advice and possible
17 recommendation to the Convention without the immediate pressure of the meeting
18 being on the next day. It is also intended to allow time for the Church to receive that
19 advice. One lesson we have learned from dialogue is that reception takes time and
20 intentionality. The bishops will be meeting immediately after this GPC to discuss how the
21 advice of GPC can best be disseminated through the Church, particularly among the
22 voting delegates to the Convention.

23 These additional arrangements have implications in terms of time, travel, and finance. I
24 thank you and your parishes/ministry places for your consideration in making this
25 possible.

26 Every day of Convention will open with a full communion service. The basic meeting
27 structure will then look like this:

- 28 Day 1. Tuesday evening – worship with dignitaries present
- 29 Day 2. Wednesday – opening procedures and board reporting
- 30 Day 3. Thursday – Convention business: proposals
- 31 Day 4. Friday – a full day on the ordination matter
- 32 Day 5. Saturday – decision making from Friday and Thursday
- 33 Day 6. Sunday – closing worship

34 The Convention planning team hopes that this clear arrangement will allow the relevant
35 people to know when they are reporting, how much time they have, and for everyone to
36 know when significant issues will be dealt with.

37 Please make sure you are able to be present for the entire gathering – especially if you
38 are a pastor delegate. Worship will be central. It is not an optional extra from which you
39 may absent yourselves. Convention dates have been advertised for many months to give
40 you plenty of time to prepare your schedule to be there the whole time.

41 You will have already heard that delegates will be seated ‘cabaret’ style in the main
42 meeting space. Just recently I learned that this arrangement will not allow room for
43 visitors and non-delegates to be in the same physical space. We are not permitting

1 overcrowding of the venue both for safety/legal reasons and because that was a
2 complaint last time. Visitors will be accommodated in another space with live feed via
3 large screens. The separation of delegates and non-delegates during debate, however, is
4 intentional, and it will be a new feature of the Convention. It is intended to allow
5 delegates, who are the decision makers, to conduct a focussed and intentional debate.
6 This will be important due to the highly contentious nature of the main issue.

7 A misunderstanding has arisen among some that a consensus or dialogue process will
8 entirely replace plenary debate and voting. This is not the case. In communication we
9 have been emphasising dialogue because this is new and we need to learn how to do it. A
10 generous time allowance has also been provided for plenary debate. Constitutionally,
11 voting is the only mechanism the LCA has to decide a major issue, particularly on
12 doctrine. You are all aware that any change in doctrine requires a 2/3 majority of delegates
13 registered for the meeting. Currently a vote is scheduled for Saturday morning, allowing
14 delegates to rest and pray about it overnight.

3.2. The OWL website – what it’s all about

15 The Ordination: We’re Listening website has been a feature of the pre-Convention
16 process. Many people are using it – lay and pastor alike. Unfortunately a few are ignoring
17 it as an affront to the way the LCA should do its business. Others are tired of the whole
18 thing and just want the Bishops to hand down a ruling.

19 In the information handed to you when you signed in for this Conference you will have
20 received an OWL DVD and an OWL booklet. Providing you with these resources is
21 intended to encourage those of you who haven’t already done so to engage your
22 parishioners in a productive session on the ordination issue. While I realise that some of
23 us prefer the traditional ‘pro’ and ‘con’ papers followed by questions, I am making one
24 more plea to allow people to tell their personal stories, feel valued and safe within the
25 group, able to add their voice, and consider the doctrine and Scriptural issues openly.
26 This is not always possible using the traditional method, especially when there are strong
27 personalities and views present.

28 Statements are being posted on the OWL website which do not reflect or endorse the
29 official position of the LCA, but give a personal opinion. The website makes it clear that
30 this is the case, and it has been a revealing exercise, to say the least. The contemporary
31 reality is that most people will not accept forced conformity or uniformity. The persuasive
32 power is faith, and faith is a gift from God. People have been given permission to speak,
33 and our role as pastors in this debate is to keep our common faith central. We must listen
34 to what people are saying so we can minister meaningfully to them once the vote has
35 been taken and the decision, whatever it will be, has been made. This is your pastoral
36 opportunity to stand by the people of the Church, hear them, and understand what is
37 needed to care and nurture them in the faith.

38 I also want to add a word about our participation on the blog pages of the OWL website
39 as pastors. Over the years it has been necessary to close down an LCA blog site. Somehow
40 the rules of politeness and courtesy, fairness and equity, became increasingly ignored by
41 a few contributors, sadly including members of the pastorate. It created an abusive,
42 dangerous environment which was not conducive or helpful in developing understanding.
43 In the Church, we don’t ‘win’ by shouting the loudest and longest. Please, in considering
44 your contributions to the OWL blog, have a care for the fact that finally some more timid
45 lay voices are starting to dare to be heard. Let them flourish for a while, and listen to
46 what they might have to say. Pastors get plenty of chances to speak in our Church, and

1 we occupy the pulpits. Laypeople of equal intelligence and acumen frequently do not get
2 that chance. If OWL is to work for the common good, it needs us to respect its processes.

3.3. What is/is not meant by 'dialogue'?

3 Dialogue is not a haphazard, off the cuff, leave it to chance affair. It is a deliberative
4 process of careful training and consideration. We have been well served in this by the
5 Ordination Dialogue Group originally requested at the 2009 Convention. The 5 pastors
6 who form this group were selected by Dr Mike Semmler for the task and their input has
7 been exemplary. I encourage you to listen carefully at this Conference as they present the
8 5 Principles of Dialogue which they have developed, and share their own stories of what
9 dialogue has been like for them.

10 While we have been emphasising Dialogue in the current period, it's not entirely new to
11 us. In your parishes, your home life, and your community life, it is likely that you practice
12 a form of dialogue every day. We listen to each other, learn from each other, make
13 allowances for each other, comfort those in pain or distress, and act together for the
14 common good. As Christians we have the benefit of having Jesus join in our conversation,
15 sometimes unrecognised, much as he did with the two disciples as they walked to
16 Emmaus after the resurrection.

4. 50 500: Faith Freedom Future

17 In 1996 Openbook Publishers, as we still had it in those days, published Everard Leske's book on
18 the history of Lutherans in Australia under the title '*For Faith and Freedom*'. That was nearly 20
19 years ago, at the 30th anniversary of the formation of the LCA. 2016 will mark the 50th
20 anniversary of our Synod. (Yes, I know that Altar and Pulpit fellowship was declared in 1965)

21 In 1517 Martin Luther famously published his 95 Theses, reportedly by nailing them to the door
22 of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Saxony. 500 years later they are still stuck there, cast in
23 bronze, and the refurbished church is about to have its scaffolding and cladding removed to
24 reveal a costly yet sensitive restoration paid for by the German government. The Lutheran
25 world, along with many other Protestants, takes those Theses as the start of a Reformation that
26 reshaped the Western World, and brought the gospel clearly to light once again.

27 Over the next Synodical term the LCA will be celebrating these twin anniversaries, one domestic
28 and one global. We will bring them together under the banner **50 500: Faith Freedom Future**.
29 The future component will come to the fore in 2018 when the XIX LCA Convention of Synod is to
30 be held.

31 General Church Council is preparing a proposal for this year's Convention which will encourage
32 us all to commemorate and celebrate 50 years of unity and 500 years of Reformation. Rather
33 than a single mega-event, the three years will be marked by a 'rolling' number of events
34 internationally, nationally, and locally. Some are already planned, but many are still to come.
35 Individual LCA events will be badged with a 50 500 logo, and congregations will be able to get in
36 on the act by registering local happenings on a website. Watch the website, the Lutheran, and
37 LCA eNews for further information when the time comes.

5. Contemporary Issues in Society and the Church

5.1. Marriage

38 On 29th May, in response to the Irish Referendum, I released a statement to the members
39 of the LCA on Marriage – see [Appendix 2](#). It was released via eNews, the LCA website, and
40 it will appear in the July edition of The Lutheran. I have reports from a number of places

1 that the statement has been disseminated through congregations, young adult groups,
2 Lutheran schools, and among university students. Generally speaking the response has
3 been positive.

4 The statement affirms the LCA's position on marriage.

5 The trend in western societies to adopt same sex marriage legislation continues to gather
6 momentum. On the 26th June the US Supreme Court ruled that the US Constitution's
7 guarantees of due process and equal protection under the law mean that states cannot
8 ban same-sex marriages. In Australia same sex marriage is likely to be back on the
9 Parliamentary agenda after the winter break. Some kind of vote is likely before the end of
10 this year.

11 Pastors of the LCA should be reminded that this is not a new issue for us. New Zealand
12 legalised same-sex marriage in 2013, and the LCA NZ, in line with the rest of the LCA, has
13 maintained its teaching and practice as it always has.

14 The best case scenario for us in Australia is that the Marriage Act of 1961 stays as it is,
15 and the state explores other ways of providing for the relationship stability being sought
16 by LGBTI couples without eroding the unique divinely sanctioned relationship between a
17 man and a woman. The worst case scenario for us, which I believe is unlikely, is that, with
18 a change in the law the government would seek to force churches to solemnise same sex
19 relationships, as reports say has happened in Canada and some other countries. If that
20 were to be the case then I think the LCA would be likely to withdraw from conducting the
21 legal aspects of marriage, in which we basically operate as servants of the government,
22 and move to something like the French or German system, in which marriage is a civil
23 ceremony which may or may not be blessed subsequently in a religious ceremony.

24 The strong likelihood is that we will end up somewhere between those two extremes. If
25 same-sex marriage does become law in Australia, the rites of the LCA will not allow an
26 LCA pastor to conduct such a marriage, as it is contrary to our teaching. Given the New
27 Zealand experience so far, and the prevailing temperament of Australians, it is unlikely
28 that the government will attempt to force churches to conduct marriages which are not
29 in accordance with their beliefs.

30 This still leaves us with the question of how we contribute to the current debate in
31 society. The Catholic Church already has published resources in this area, produced by
32 teams of theologians and thinkers. We are not in that position, and will need to do our
33 work 'on the run'. The Office of Bishop has begun to assemble a group to help steer the
34 LCA's contribution to the social debate, but the pressures of GPC and General Convention
35 have made us proceed more slowly than otherwise we might have. When we do begin
36 this work in earnest, which should be soon, I will ask you to participate and contribute as
37 much as you are able. We will aim to provide resources for congregational study and
38 reflection, and aids that will help people understand the church's position. We will also
39 consider opinion pieces for the press, and possible representation to politicians, either on
40 our own, or preferably in consortium with other Christians.

41 In the meantime, later in July, the new work of the CTICR on Human Sexuality is due for
42 release. I quoted from that work in the Statement. There will be two documents: a longer
43 one (which Pastors have already seen); and a shorter one for popular use. They will be
44 accompanied by a Bible Study series which has been prepared by Pastor Jim Pietsch
45 based on the longer document and is currently under review. This work will help inform
46 us as we consider the marriage issue alongside the social reality of gay relationships and
47 the inclusion of LGBTI people in our society and in our church.

1 I have appended to this report (Appendix 3) a [speech by Lord Sacks](#), former UK Chief
2 Rabbi, which he gave at the Vatican in 2014. It is well worth reading. You can also access
3 it at [http://cvcomment.org/2014/11/18/in-full-the-lord-sacks-speech-that-brought-the-](http://cvcomment.org/2014/11/18/in-full-the-lord-sacks-speech-that-brought-the-vatican-conference-to-its-feet)
4 [vatican-conference-to-its-feet](http://cvcomment.org/2014/11/18/in-full-the-lord-sacks-speech-that-brought-the-vatican-conference-to-its-feet).

5.2. Domestic Violence

5 If you want to track what is likely to be the ‘next big issue’ in our society after the sexual
6 abuse of children and gay marriage, I am told that it is very likely to be Domestic Violence
7 (DV). You might well ask what that has to do with the Church. Surely as pastors we
8 minister to people who are living DV situations. We counsel vulnerable partners, who are
9 predominantly women, to place themselves and their children out of harms’ way.

10 The likelihood is that just about all of us will have been personally touched by DV,
11 through our own marriages, family, relations, friends, or parishioners. Studies show that
12 if there is domestic violence in society, the same or a similar ratio of abuse will be found
13 in the membership of the Church. That’s to be expected, since members of the Church
14 are drawn directly out of society, and have all the same foibles and problems –
15 alcoholism, gambling, substance abuse, suicidal tendencies, and so on. Among these we
16 must also include DV.

17 In the past, DV has been a largely silent crime, but no longer. The new factor for
18 evangelical pastors is that some public commentators and researchers are finding reason
19 to blame the church for the prevalence of domestic violence in society. They cite the
20 teaching and practice of the subordination of women.³ Preventing domestic violence and
21 recognising the danger of legitimising it through tacit approval is something we need to
22 take seriously, and will present another major challenge for the Church.

5.3. Refugees and Asylum Seekers

23 Many of us continue to be appalled, yet feel relatively powerless, about the way refugees
24 are being treated when they attempt to arrive in Australia in leaky boats. Part of that
25 powerlessness comes from the realisation that the bad treatment of these people has
26 become bipartisan. The most recent piece of legislation, which critics say is very clumsily
27 worded, prohibits workers in offshore detention centres from revealing anything about
28 what they see and experience there. If they break this silence, they are threatened with a
29 2 year prison sentence. This is a most extraordinary piece of legislation in a democratic
30 country like Australia, and it sets a dangerous precedent.

31 Another scandal is the lingering accusation that the Australian government has been
32 lining the pockets of people smugglers by paying them to take their boats, with their
33 human cargoes, back to their country of origin. This has outraged Indonesia, and our
34 diplomatic relations with our largest and most important neighbour are at a low ebb.

35 Many people in the LCA, pastors among them, work tirelessly for refugees, helping them
36 find a place in our Church and in our society. The LCA has a strong history in refugee
37 resettlement. A modern version of history might even classify Pastor Kavel and his flock
38 as religious refugees who arrived by boat – not that there was any other way of getting to
39 Australia at the time.

40 I encourage you to join forces with like-minded people in your community, such as
41 refugee advocacy groups, and work with them collectively for a better and more
42 humanitarian approach by our government to people in desperate need.

³ See, for instance, Dr Josie Skimming in The Age, ‘Why women leave the Christian Church’, 5 March 2015,
<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/why-women-leave-the-christian-church-20150305-13vgig.html>.

5.4. Terrorism

1 I have written about our response to the threat of terrorism in my reports to District
2 Conventions. The recent mass shooting in a church in Charleston, South Carolina by a 21
3 year-old with a political agenda shows that terrorism comes in many different guises. The
4 witness many parishioners from that church gave to their faith in the face of this extreme
5 provocation and ‘hate crime’ was outstanding. Even the media did not manage to
6 completely smother the message of hope and love that they evidently carry.

7 We can feel completely powerless before this threat. It is difficult to keep a sense of
8 perspective. Many of us were brought up thinking that the world is and should always be
9 a ‘safe place’. Sadly, this has never been true for the vast majority of the global
10 population. Australians and New Zealanders have enjoyed an extended period of
11 privilege during which, if we had the money, we could travel virtually wherever we
12 wanted with impunity, enjoying life as tourists and soaking up the bucket list of
13 experiences. That time might be gradually drawing to a close.

14 In a world of fear, proclaiming the gospel of the love of Jesus, and our safety in the God
15 who loves us, becomes more urgent than ever. The words of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21
16 gain new meaning: *‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and
17 rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures
18 in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and
19 steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’*

5.5. Persecution

20 A media article by columnist Andrew Bolt in April, syndicated across Australian Murdoch
21 Press newspapers, has aroused the attention of many people to the plight of Christians
22 who are being persecuted and driven from their homes and places of worship in the
23 Middle East and Africa.⁴

24 In the Adelaide Advertiser the article was accompanied by a moving photo of the Nigerian
25 girls taken from their school by Boko Haram and held in captivity.

26 There is no doubt that there is a growing push among religious extremists to remove
27 Christianity from the Middle East and some countries in North Africa. There are also
28 parallel, ruthless efforts to ‘cleanse’ some Islamic movements and other religions as well.
29 The reasons for this dramatic push for religious and cultural purity are many and
30 complex, and go back a long way, before colonial times. A dramatic re-adjustment is
31 underway following the withdrawal of the former European Christian powers from these
32 regions.

33 Most of the Christians under persecution in the Middle East and many parts of northern
34 Africa are Orthodox or Eastern Rite Catholic – Coptic, Assyrian, Armenian, Antiochian,
35 Greek, Maronite and Melkite, to name a few. Some are Protestant (e.g. Anglicans,
36 Catholics, and Lutherans in Sudan). Almost all of the persecuted Christian groups have
37 living communities here in Australia. I have met and worked with many of their leaders
38 over the last 15 years. I have spoken at their rallies for religious freedom (e.g. the
39 Assyrians), I have written of their plight (e.g. the Armenians) in The Lutheran, and we
40 have asked our Church to pray for Coptic Christians in Egypt. Recently I was in a meeting
41 with a Coptic priest who spoke warmly of the support his people were receiving from
42 Australian Christians in the wake of Coptic massacres of recent times.

⁴ Andrew Bolt, ‘Why won’t the churches stand up for their own’, Adelaide Advertiser (et al), 21 April 2015

1 In the course of my ministry I have travelled to the Middle East with Australian Church
2 leaders and visited persecuted Christians there. Over the last 15 years we have spoken to
3 the Australian government, written to the press (without being published), spoken with
4 Muslim leaders here and overseas, and taken steps (admittedly not sufficient) to inform
5 our own church. None of these have met with success, or much of an audience.

6 The LCA is currently negotiating with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the
7 Holy Land to provide a vicarage for one of its pastors-in-training. This is a tangible step
8 that marks a tentative move into a more concrete relationship with our fellow Lutherans
9 in Palestine/Israel and the Jordan.

10 All of this is, admittedly, insufficient. We could, if we were able, do so much more. We
11 are facing the tide of history. The social, religious, economic, and geographic forces
12 involved are massive. Church leaders whose communities are under attack are saying
13 that in this age, to be a Christian is to be a martyr. This is not the first time in the history
14 of the Church that this has been true, and it is a courageous message that we in Australia
15 can take to heart and learn from.

16 In the face of this, what can we do?

- 17 • We need to recognise and get to know these Christian communities where they
18 exist in our own society. They need our hospitality because of the persecutions
19 back home. Their suffering was worsened, for instance when, at the time of the
20 Cronulla riots, Eastern rite Christian churches were mistaken for mosques, and
21 defaced because they were 'Eastern'. This kind of ignorance of the 'other' breeds
22 violence and contempt.
- 23 • We can learn how to support and encourage them as brothers and sisters in
24 Christ. Some of us are doing this. Often their culture will be different, their
25 liturgies unknown to us, and their worship language incomprehensible, but they
26 also believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour, and their churches have been in existence
27 much longer than ours.
- 28 • We can give financial help if needed and provide prayer support.
- 29 • We can write to opinion shapers like Andrew Bolt and ask them to continue to
30 advocate for the needs of persecuted people, and to support Australian
31 Churches, rather than attack them, in their action for brothers and sisters in
32 need.
- 33 • We can pray for persecuted Christians, and cry out to God against injustice, fear,
34 and oppression.

35 There are probably many other things we can do as well. Maybe you have some ideas you
36 would like the LCA to explore.

5.6. Substance abuse

37 We are facing an epidemic of substance abuse, from the notorious party drug Ice through
38 to consistent and socially encouraged binge drinking among 25–45 year olds. A local
39 businessman from a community with a strong Lutheran presence told me that he needs
40 to drug and alcohol test his drivers before he can send them out in the mornings. He said
41 that drug use has reached the third generation, with grandparents introducing them to
42 their grandchildren. His implication was that many of these drivers and grandparents are,
43 or have been, members of our church.

44 I have not heard much about this issue yet from the pastorate, but it must be there for
45 you every week. Are there initiatives or schemes which you participate in? Do you have a
46 view on the root causes, and why such behaviour has become so socially acceptable?

1 What can the LCA do to support local congregations in their efforts to care for those
2 affected?

5.7. Indigenous Recognition

3 Pivot points in Australian Indigenous rights occur from time to time in our society: the
4 referendum in 1967; the Mabo decision in 1992; the Wik decision in 1996; the Indigenous
5 Intervention in 2007; and the Rudd apology in 2008. We now seem to be moving towards
6 another such moment through the drive towards a Referendum to recognise Indigenous
7 people in the Constitution.

8 The membership of the LCA comprises both Indigenous and non-Indigenous believers. In
9 Central Australia and Cape York large numbers of Aboriginal people are practicing
10 Lutheran Christians.

11 Right now Aboriginal Lutherans are under-represented in our leadership and decision
12 making structures. In fact they are barely represented at all, despite more than 130 years
13 of consistent mission work. There are exceptions, of course, but we must be able to do
14 better. This is not to doubt the sacrificial and sometimes heroic work which still goes on
15 in Aboriginal communities through AbMinSA, FRM, and Far North Queensland Mission.
16 The LCA stands by that work and encourages it. But what would the Church look like if
17 Aboriginal people had a voice in our Councils, Synods, and decision making processes.
18 What new possibilities for faith and mission would open up if that were the case? How
19 would we understand our faith in a new setting? It would not be easy, but it will be
20 necessary.

5.8. 'Lutheran Renewal'

21 Recently most of you will have received an unsolicited copy of a 'Lutheran Renewal'
22 newsletter and associated emails, and some of you will have looked at the website
23 www.lutheranrenewal.org.au with associated videos. Some pastors have written in
24 response to this material with views ranging from cautious encouragement to severe
25 censure.

26 Disappointingly, I was misquoted in the initial communication as having endorsed, or
27 given my blessing, to this action. That is not the case. It is my manner not to take an
28 immediate adversarial stance, and in what I had thought was a private conversation I said
29 I wouldn't automatically oppose it and would want to talk about it further. The LCA is not
30 a 'revival' Church but that hasn't stopped renewal being part of our life over the decades.
31 Many fine Christians have been involved in renewal, with some beneficial effects. I had
32 expected further conversation to follow on what a Biblical, gospel centred renewal
33 movement would look like. My unprepared and informal comments were not meant to
34 be construed as official endorsement of individual actions taken before or afterwards.

35 On this topic I have written the following, which appears in the July edition of The
36 Lutheran:

37 *When I was at Seminary in the 1970s and a young pastor in the early 1980s Lutheran*
38 *Renewal was the talk of the Church. Sometimes this talk was happy, and sometimes it was*
39 *argumentative. The winds of change were causing controversy over matters of faith, just*
40 *as they still are.*

41 *As is the way of most movements, Renewal eventually petered out. By the '90s our*
42 *attention had turned to the so-called 'worship wars' and the Church Growth movement.*
43 *Some former Renewal leaders went on to become significant leaders in the LCA.*

1 *The movement might have faded, but that doesn't mean there hasn't always been a*
2 *desire to experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This desire is stronger among some than*
3 *others. It reflects the diversity of the Church.*

4 *Today there is a push to re-establish Renewal as a distinct movement in the LCA. This time*
5 *its origins are a little different, but the spiritual landscape is very much the same. The*
6 *questions before the Church are also likely to be similar: is such renewal compatible with*
7 *faith in Christ as our Lord and Saviour? How do we read Scripture in this area? Can*
8 *Renewal and the Church work together, or must they be in conflict? People are watching*
9 *to see which it will be.*

10 *The issues are also likely to be similar to the 1980s. Are special gifts, such as healing,*
11 *speaking in tongues, and signs and wonders, necessary for a Christian? Do we have to be*
12 *baptised a second time (that is, with the Holy Spirit) to be born again? Can we prove that*
13 *one Christian is reborn and another is not? Does the expectation of obvious gifts and signs*
14 *detract from or enhance our hope in Jesus our Saviour? These questions, and others, are*
15 *likely to be as controversial now as they were then.*

16 *Before we get too deep into these questions we must go back to the basics of how God*
17 *saves us and how a saved person should live. The Small Catechism, for instance, speaks*
18 *clearly about how saved, baptised people will live: "Our sinful self, with all its evil deeds*
19 *and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance; and ... day after day a new self*
20 *should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity for ever". Daily, unspectacular*
21 *renewal through repentance, forgiveness, and acts of love, should be as much a part of*
22 *every Christian's life as breathing-out and breathing-in.*

23 *Any renewal we might currently experience can only be a sign of that greater and final*
24 *renewal, when God will make "all things new" (Rev. 21:5), and we will "sing a new song*
25 *before the throne" (Rev. 14:3; 5:9). God has kept many of the details shrouded in divine*
26 *mystery, but this we know: "We shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on*
27 *the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:52, 53).*
28 *When this happens, our final transformation – our ultimate renewal – will have taken*
29 *place.*

30 In the immediate future we plan to republish a Bible studies on Renewal which was
31 prepared in the 1980s by Ulf Metzner and Paul Renner, and are waiting for permission to
32 do so. An excellent series of tracts, linked to the studies, is still available from the LLL
33 Tract Mission. Just contact them and they will know what you are talking about.

6. Accountability

6.1. Professional Standards and Reconciliation Ministry

34 Over the last few years the LCA has been busy establishing a Professional Standards Unit.
35 You will have read and heard reports at District Pastors Conferences and Synods, and
36 some of you might have had dealings with the PSU in between times.

37 Over the same period, starting with Ambassadors for Reconciliation in the early
38 noughties, the LCA has established Reconciliation Ministry to promote a Biblical lifestyle
39 of reconciliation throughout the Church. This ministry is distinctly different from PSU, but
40 I regard the two as complementary.

41 Alongside both these initiatives the LCA has been developing and implementing policies
42 and procedures to help us work in those 'grey' areas of conflict or dispute. We are
43 attempting to ensure greater transparency and procedural fairness. Again, this work has
44 not been without dispute, and there has been a certain amount of 'push back' by some.

1 We are gradually getting better at doing things, and I thank you for the cooperation most
2 of you have given to this work. Over the next few years we intend to strengthen these
3 efforts, and take on board the many things we are learning. I encourage you as pastors
4 and leaders to offer your cooperation, support, and prayers, for those who work in the
5 PSU with its Director, Liz Crawford, and those who work in Reconciliation Ministry with
6 the new Assistant to the Bishop for Reconciliation Ministry, Paul Kerber. They are there to
7 serve the Church and each one of us in our needs.

6.2. Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australia)

8 The Royal Commission is now well into its 3rd year of operation. When it began in 2013
9 President Mike Semmler said, '[The LCA] welcomes and fully supports all initiatives that
10 will protect children, bring healing to those abused, achieve reconciliation where that is
11 possible, and bring to justice those who have perpetrated evil acts against vulnerable
12 individuals'.

13 A hard working group diligently monitors the work of the Commission on your behalf, and
14 responds to requests to produce documentation. This is a far bigger task than you might
15 assume, since most of us pastors have been sheltered from having to deal with this quite
16 massive inquiry which has already gone well beyond its original time frame and as yet
17 shows no sign of abating.

18 To say the work of the Commission has attracted attention in the press and wider society
19 would be an understatement. So far we have not been the subject of any public hearings
20 and the LCA's involvement has not been sufficient to attract media attention. That does
21 not mean, however, that we can 'take it easy' and ignore the significant impact of the
22 Commission's work.

23 The LCA has shown it is serious about the protection of children by insisting that all
24 people in the church working with children complete ChildSafe training and, as
25 appropriate, have a police check or Working with Children check, or (in Queensland) hold
26 a 'blue card'.

27 If the Commission recommends ways to improve systems and processes, the LCA will
28 implement them. In the meantime, the LCA encourages all agencies and individuals to
29 ensure they are providing a safe environment for children in their care by implementing
30 the church's child-protection-related policies and procedures. It is your responsibility as a
31 pastor to see that you comply with all such requirements, and also to support the
32 compliance of your congregation or ministry area. It is not a defence to plead ignorance
33 or laziness when the safety of children is at stake.

6.3. Public scrutiny of the ministry

34 Both 5.1 and 5.2 remind me of how much the public practice of the ministry has changed
35 in the 33½ years since I was ordained. It can feel like so much more is expected of us. I
36 hear some pastors say this is unfair. They ask the Church to roll back the standards it is
37 adopting, and reduce the levels of scrutiny. We are pastors, I hear the cry, and not
38 subject to the world. Let us get on with the Lord's business!

39 TA VI 10 makes it clear that in ordering the ministry the LCA must respond to the Lord's
40 command 'that everything be done decently and in order and in accordance with the law
41 of love. Such arrangements may vary according to time and circumstances.' We are
42 working on improving our human arrangements, and it is very clear that current
43 circumstances demand it of us. Over the years society and individuals have experienced
44 immense and enduring harm because of inadequate scrutiny of those in positions of

1 trust. This has applied especially and tragically to leaders in churches, charities, and
2 community groups.

3 Our human solutions will not be perfect, and they do not replace the gospel, but they are
4 necessary. A pastor, by virtue of his calling, is a public figure. He must be able to
5 demonstrate that he is trustworthy in every circumstance. Each of us is responsible for
6 sharing the gospel and caring for those entrusted to us. Along with those treasures we
7 also carry the legitimacy, name, and reputation of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

7. Leadership and administration

7.1. The College of Bishops

8 I take this opportunity to thank my fellow bishops, many of whom were taken by surprise
9 in becoming bishops at all: Noel Noack (retiring in August), Greg Pietsch (standing down
10 as Assistant Bishop), David Altus, Mark Lieschke, Mark Whitfield, and Greg Pfeiffer.
11 Neville Otto has also been a most reliable part of the College, becoming full time
12 Secretary of the Church this year, relinquishing his former Mission responsibilities.

13 In the LCA, a Bishop is a pastor among other pastors, but he does not have many direct
14 peers. He is more isolated than you might imagine, knowing many things without being
15 able to speak of them, and often unable to directly intervene. He is a servant, yet he is
16 expected to lead, carrying a large burden of responsibility for the Church and its pastors.
17 When he is able to take action he is easily criticised, sometimes attacked, and
18 occasionally praised. He does not receive the intimacy and support of a congregational
19 call. His commitments frequently take him away from home and place pressure on his
20 personal life. Unlike most LCA calls, he must be re-elected every few years if he is to
21 continue in his ministry. He is everybody's pastor, but no one in particular is his pastor.

22 Nevertheless it is an extraordinarily privileged calling which provides a rich and deep
23 experience of the pastoral life. Well lived, it teaches patience, grace, and understanding.
24 The ministry rewards are as many, or more, than the trials. I encourage you to pray for
25 your District Bishop, as I know you already do, and work together with him as your co-
26 worker in the Lord's vineyard.

27 For my part, the College of Bishops has been a place for growth and mature reflection. It
28 is your leadership team, and I feel privileged to be part of such a gifted group.

7.2. The Governance and Administration Review

29 You will remember that in 2013 the General Convention commissioned a review of the
30 LCA's 'Governance and Leadership capability'. The General Church Council diligently
31 carried out what turned out to be a major piece of work, involving interviews and
32 responses from across the Church. The report was completed on schedule and the 28
33 recommendations are now being sifted through, assessed, and where agreed on,
34 implemented. The GCC will also bring consequent proposals to Synod where necessary.

35 Just because something was recommended by the reviewer does not mean we will be
36 doing it. We should not, however, let this moment pass without doing whatever we can
37 to improve the way we conduct our governance and administration.

38 During the review process it was revealing to discover that no-one was able to draw a
39 picture or graph of how LCA decision making processes operate. We are largely a 'ground
40 up' collection of activities and ministries, many of which operate as silos with only
41 nominal links to each other. As the 'peak' governance body outside of Synods, the GCC
42 has an unmanageable number of Boards and Committees reporting to it and has a

1 crippling work load for a volunteer board. The College of Bishops, which operates under
2 delegated authority from the GCC, is threatened with the same level of over-work. Such
3 complexity makes clear, strategic, and consistent decision making extremely difficult.

4 All that is complicated enough, but additionally it has proven astoundingly difficult to
5 place the Districts of the LCA into an organisational diagram of the LCA. Districts are an
6 essential part of the LCA that we take for granted. The review in no way compromises
7 their existence, but we do have to learn more about how one part relates to another.

8 The LCA has traditionally worked from a largely oral culture. This is so despite our
9 somewhat Germanic propensity to write things down and have a rule for everything. Our
10 oral culture often makes its connections through families, relationships, and personal
11 histories. In a society where so many of us are now disconnected from our roots, and
12 where evangelism has brought new members into the church who end up in positions of
13 leadership, this mode of operation is becoming more and more difficult. I guess you could
14 say that we are going through a perfectly natural generational change. While unsettling,
15 there is little we can do except to take stock and work out what to do next. This means
16 doing the 'hard yards' and expending a great deal of energy in the process.

8. Conclusion

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the
Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having
the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or
conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to
your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in
Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.⁵



⁵ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (Philippians 2:1–11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Respectfully submitted
John Henderson
Bishop
Adelaide, 1 July 2015

Appendices to the Bishop's Report

Appendix 1: Theses of Agreement on the Ministry

Some notes on this paraphrase:

1. It is an attempt to convey the essence of Article 6 in everyday language. It therefore seeks to avoid technical language.
2. In some sections (particularly numbers 4 and 6), the background to the main point is added to make it easier to understand.
3. Too many texts are listed to print them all – the one chosen is representative. The translation used is the NIV.
4. All other references are to documents in the Lutheran Confessions.
5. Two guiding principles arise from the Theses of Agreement Article 6.
 - a. Since Christ calls individuals into the ordained ministry, any discussion on the nature of that ministry needs to centre on discerning His will from Scripture.
 - b. The ordained ministry exists to administer the means of Grace. Grace therefore should inform any discussion of ordination rather than law and precedent.

Pastor (emeritus) Richard Zweck, June 2015

A PARAPHRASE OF THE THESES OF AGREEMENT ON THE MINISTRY

1. Christ created the Christian ministry to serve the church with the means of Grace. The means of Grace are the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism. The Holy Spirit works through the Means of Grace to lead people to faith in Jesus and so grow the Church.

Matthew 10:1 – (Jesus) called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

See also: Matthew 10; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 9:1.2; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; 2 Corinthians 3:5-8; Augsburg Confession V; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI 29.

2. The Christian ministry is not our invention but God's creation.

Acts 20:28 – Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

See also: 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 4:11; Apology to the Augsburg Confession XIII 11.

3. The Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions agree that:
 - 1) Jesus commanded his followers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments.
 - 2) The Spirit uses the means of grace to create Christ's Church.
 - 3) Jesus promised the Church would remain on earth until he returns (Matthew 16:18).

Therefore the Christian ministry will be present in Christ's Church until he returns.

Matthew 28:18-20 – Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

See also: Mark 16: 15-16; Romans 10:8-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 16:25-26; Augsburg Confession XXVIII, 8-10, 20-21.

4. Christ gave every Christian, and therefore all congregations, the right to announce the Gospel (that a person's sins are 'forgiven') and the Law (that a person's sins are 'not forgiven'). This is called 'the Office of the Keys.'

Matthew 16:19 – *(Jesus said to Peter,) "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Every Christian is now empowered to announce the forgiveness of sins. Only priests could do that in Old Testament times. We call this gift, 'the priesthood of all believers'.

While every Christian can exercise this gift in private, the Lutheran church sets apart its ordained pastors to perform this duty publicly. This ensures that the public exercise of the Office of the Keys is performed, 'decently and in order'. (1 Corinthians 14:40)

See also: Matthew 18: 15-20; 1 Peter 2:9; John 20: 19-23; Luke 24:33-36; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Romans 10:15; Smalcald Articles, Tract. 24, 67-69.

5. An ordained Christian pastor serves Christ and the church by preaching the Gospel, performing baptisms, and administering Holy Communion. Pastors do not do this ministry through their own authority. This ministry is performed by Christ's command and under Jesus' authority.

This means:

- 1) A pastor does not have the right to arbitrarily impose rules on parishioners.
- 2) The pastor is not the congregation's employee who must do as they are told.
- 3) The pastor is not born into the ministry as priests were in Old Testament times.
- 4) Pastors are not a superior class of Christians.
- 5) Pastors are not 'holier' than other Christians.
- 6) The church must ordain all pastors. Ordination cannot be passed down from parent to child and no one can arbitrarily ordain a pastor.

2 Corinthians 4:5 – *For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

See also: (Apology to the Augsburg Confession XIII 7-11; XXIV 58.59); Matthew 23: 8-12; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 4:1,2; Col. 1:23-25; 1 Peter 5: 1-3; Matthew 20: 25-28; (Apology to the Augsburg Confession XXVIII, 13,14; XXII, 9; XXIV, 86 (German and English text re Liturgia); Smalcald Articles, Pars 11, IV, 9; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XII 30 XI 29.

6. In some Christian churches (e.g. Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox) only bishops have the authority to ordain priests through a direct line of succession from the disciples. Such churches only recognise a priest's ordination if a Bishop who is part of this unbroken line conducts it. The 'Apostolic Succession' is passed on by the laying on of hands.

Under this physical understanding of 'Apostolic succession', a priest is a priest for life.

The Lutheran Church of Australia has a spiritual understanding of 'Apostolic succession.' The New Testament teaches that 'Apostolic succession' is not passed on physically, but spiritually in the ministry of Word and Sacraments.

Therefore, in the LCA the bishop doesn't ordain, the church ordains. A valid ordination must be accompanied by a call from the church to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. Lutheran pastors are not 'priests for life' and retired pastors who do not have a regular call are 'pastors emeriti' under a call from the respective District of the Church.

Acts 20:28 – *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

See also: Acts 6:1-4; Acts 1:23; Phil 1:1; Col 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:1ff, 5:17; Titus 1:5ff; 1 Peter 5:1; Hebrews 13:17; Apology to the Augsburg Confession XV 2 (..); Smalcald Articles Tractatus 10 13.15.60-65; Smalcald Articles Pars 11, IV, 9; Formula of Concord Solid Declaration X 10.

7. Only a pastor who has been regularly called by the LCA may teach public doctrine and administer the sacraments in a Lutheran congregation.

A Lutheran pastor must be called by a Lutheran congregation, parish or through properly appointed representatives. Therefore, Christ calls a person into the Christian ministry through the Church, which acts on His behalf and by His authority.

Christ calls every pastor.

Every pastor is therefore a servant of Christ, a minister in His New Testament Church and called to preach the Gospel, baptise, and administer Holy Communion.

Acts 13: 1-4 – Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch), and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and sailed from there to Cyprus.

See also: I Timothy 3:1.7; Titus 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 2:24.25; Acts 1:24; and 2 Corinthians 4:5; Romans 10:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Augsburg Confession XIV; Apology to the Augsburg Confession VII 28 (end of paragraph); Smalcald Articles Tractatus 14, 15, 24, 26, 67, 69.

8. The Lutheran Church recognises only 2 sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. Jesus directly commanded them and through them we receive God’s Grace.

Therefore, ordination in the Lutheran church is not considered a sacrament.

Ordination is the Church rite by which a qualified person, called by a congregation or the church, is received as a pastor and a gift by Christ to the church. It is a public declaration that this person is now a called minister of the New Testament Church.

During the rite, the person is blessed and hands are laid on them. The laying on of hands is an ancient, biblical rite but it is not essential for a person to become a pastor.

Titus 1:5 – (Paul writes) The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

Numbers 27:18 – So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him.”

See: 1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:5-9; Ephesians 4: 11; Acts 6:6, 8:17, 13:3; 1 Timothy 5:22, 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; Smalcald Articles Tractatus 70.

9. The Christian ministry is the only office Jesus requires for His New Testament Church. Every Christian congregation is free to establish other offices as needed: Elders, deacons, teachers, Sunday-school teachers, trustees, wardens, etc. This follows the example of the apostles and the early Christian Church.

Romans 16:1 – (Paul writes), I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.

See also: Acts 6:6

10. In the same way, Christ frees the General church to establish ministries and call officers, as it sees fit.

The Church has this spiritual and administrative oversight to ensure:

- 1) Everything is done to follow Christ's command to make disciples of all nations.
- 2) That everything is done decently and in order, as Christ commanded.
- 3) That everything is done in a loving way.

When circumstances change, these ministries and offices may change.

The congregation is also free to decide on its organisational structure and its ministry structure. (For example a congregation may choose to call one minister, the 'senior pastor'.)

The ministry of the Gospel is not bound by any human structure.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 – There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

See also: 1 Corinthians 12:4-13, 26-28; Acts 11:21-23. I Corinthians 14:40; 2 Corinthians 8:18-21; 9:5, Matthew 23:8; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; Augsburg Confession XV; XXVIII, 5-29; Smalcald Articles Tractatus 10, 11, 61-65.

11. The Holy Spirit used women prophets in the Old and New Testament. The following texts however, forbid the calling of a woman into the public ministry of preaching the gospel, baptising, and administering Holy Communion:

- 1) *1 Corinthians 14:34-35 – Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*
- 2) *1 Timothy 2:11-14 – A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

St Paul was an apostle and so his rule binds the whole Church. Women however, have all the rights included in 'the priesthood of all believers.'

Appendix 2: Statement to the members of the LCA on Marriage

Friday 29 May 2015

On 22 May 2015 voters in the Republic of Ireland were asked to determine whether *'marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex'*. Of nearly 2 million votes cast, 62% voted 'yes'.

The success of this referendum, supported by the Irish government, has sparked a worldwide response. It is seen as the first popular vote to enact same-sex marriage, rather than a vote by elected representatives, as has already happened in New Zealand (2013), many European countries, and parts of the USA. Does this signify a turning of the popular tide in relation to the issue, and how should we respond?

A senior Vatican diplomat, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, has said, "The church must take account of this reality, but in the sense that it must strengthen its commitment to evangelisation. I think that you cannot just talk of a defeat for Christian principles, but of a defeat for humanity."

Opposition Leader, Bill Shorten, and his deputy, Tanya Plibersek, were among the first Australian politicians to respond to the Irish referendum by introducing a private members bill to Parliament. Well-known voices such as 2GB's Alan Jones have come out in support of same sex marriage. Now Prime Minister Tony Abbot seems to be preparing for a free vote in the Parliament, without the usual 'party line' restrictions. It could take place as early as August. All this seems to mean that the odds of a change in Australian marriage law have increased significantly.

In Australia, marriage is regulated by a Federal Act (1961), which defines marriage as *'the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life'*.

While in full agreement with this definition, the Lutheran Church of Australia recognises that governments have the duty and responsibility under God to make and enforce laws for the ordering of society. For Lutherans marriage is not a sacrament belonging to our salvation, but an order for the welfare of human society. If the rules of society stand in clear contradiction of the Word of God, the church is not bound by them.

An example of this freedom occurred when the LCA discussed conscientious objection to conscripted military service during the Vietnam War. It argued: *When governments wantonly subvert their God-ordained functions and act in contempt and violation of God's law, the individual Christian is bound to examine his position as a citizen and to let his conscience, bound by the Word of God, determine at what point and in which matters he must refuse obedience rather than to permit men to involve him in sin. Acts 5:29; Augsburg Confession XVI, 2.3.7. (Conscientious Objection to Service in War, CTICR, adopted by General Convention 1970)*

So if the government were to change the law on marriage, the LCA would not be obligated to change its position on marriage. LCA pastors will not conduct same sex weddings. The legal requirement under which a religious celebrant conducts a marriage is that it be in accordance with the rites of the Church. The LCA marriage rite is clear in this regard, quoting Genesis 1:27-31, *'God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it'. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good'* and Matthew 19:4-6 *'Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no-one separate.'*

In 1978 the LCA issued a statement on 'Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage', which reads in part:

1. *God, the Creator of humankind, instituted marriage. It is part of the created social order. So society, through custom or legislation, decides when a man and a woman are in fact married (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-24; Matthew 19:3-9; Augsburg Confession 16 and 28; Apology 23.9).*

2. *Marriage is the union of a man and a woman. This union excludes all other people. It is publicly and voluntarily entered into for the whole of life (Matthew 19:6; 1 Corinthians 7:39).*
3. *The purpose of marriage is*
 - *to unite one man and one woman (that is, husband and wife) so that they become 'one flesh'. In this relationship the one person is the complement of the other (Matthew 19:5)*
 - *to produce children and to care for their upbringing within the framework of a family (Ephesians 6:1-4)*
 - *to provide an appropriate place and context for a man and a woman to have sexual relations (1 Corinthians 7:2-3).*

The Lutheran Church of Australia today still affirms this understanding of marriage. The Commission on Theology and Inter-Church relations is preparing a new statement on Human Sexuality, which is planned for release in July, along with a series of Bible Studies. Here is an excerpt on the topic of same sex marriage:

... Even though marriage's attendant rites and ceremonies may vary over time and from place to place, it still reaches back to its divine origins within creation. There God instituted marriage as the union between a man and a woman. While a same sex union may be based on romantic attraction, mutual affection and promises of long term commitment, it is not an estate given with creation and embedded in the fabric of society from time immemorial. Unlike the union of a man and a woman, it is not the natural arena for bringing children into the world and thereby perpetuating the human community. Theologically speaking, therefore, a same-sex union is not only contrary to God's design, but it does not have the fundamental features that give marriage its unique quality. To use the name 'marriage' for same-sex partnerships would be to use the same name for things that are fundamentally different.

The LCA will do what it can to bring its views to the attention of government and the voting public. Do not expect us, however, to be quoted much in the popular press. Most of that space will be taken up by the bigger, noisier, more favoured voices in our society.

For our part, God is placing before us the challenge of remaining faithful to him, and of showing love and compassion for all people. While we do not identify same sex unions as marriages, we know that all people seek and deserve the support of loving human relationships. We can no longer assume that those relationships will be in the form of marriage as the church knows it. This is the new reality in which we will share our faith in Christ. The Christian Church has no moral superiority to force its way onto society. To our mutual shame Christians have condoned evil under the banner of their churches, as the current Royal Commission is showing plainly to the whole world. Our only way forward is through repentance, turning back to Christ, and renewal in the power of his Spirit.

You and I live only by the grace of God's forgiveness in Christ, and that must be what we want for all whom we meet, heterosexual and homosexual, just as Christ came, not to condemn the world, but to save it. Finally, we will pray for our politicians, opinion makers, the churches, and the Australian public, as our society grapples with this most sensitive matter.

Pastor John Henderson
Bishop
Lutheran Church of Australia
Brisbane, 29th May, 2015

Appendix 3: Lord Sacks speech that brought Vatican Conference to its feet

<http://cvcomment.org/2014/11/18/in-full-the-lord-sacks-speech-that-brought-the-vatican-conference-to-its-feet/>

Catholic Voice Comment, posted on November 18, 2014

[From Austen Ivereigh in Rome]

Among many speeches yesterday following Pope Francis's [address](#) to the Humanum colloquium on complementarity, that of Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, was the standout, bringing the audience of 300 in the synod hall to their feet. Using dazzling oratory, he offered a magisterial account of the development of marriage from the very start — a sexual act between fish in Scotland — right up to the present day, told by means of seven stories, and ending with a spectacular exegesis of the Genesis account. It is a story with a tragic end: the dismantling of what he calls “the single most humanising institution in history” resulting in a whole new era of poverty and social division. Yet the recovery of that institution offers hope. The full speech follows.

I want this morning to begin our conversation by one way of telling the story of the most beautiful idea in the history of civilization: the idea of the love that brings new life into the world. There are of course many ways of telling the story, and this is just one. But to me it is a story of seven key moments, each of them surprising and unexpected.

The first, according to a report in the press on 20th October of this year, took place in a lake in Scotland 385 million years ago. It was then, according to this new discovery, that two fish came together to perform the first instance of sexual reproduction known to science. Until then all life had propagated itself asexually, by cell division, budding, fragmentation or parthenogenesis, all of which are far simpler and more economical than the division of life into male and female, each with a different role in creating and sustaining life.

When we consider, even in the animal kingdom, how much effort and energy the coming together of male and female takes, in terms of displays, courtship rituals, rivalries and violence, it is astonishing that sexual reproduction ever happened at all. Biologists are still not quite sure why it did. Some say to offer protection against parasites, or immunities against disease. Others say it's simply that the meeting of opposites generates diversity. But one way or another, the fish in Scotland discovered something new and beautiful that's been copied ever since by virtually all advanced forms of life. Life begins when male and female meet and embrace.

The second unexpected development was the unique challenge posed to *Homo sapiens* by two factors: we stood upright, which constricted the female pelvis, and we had bigger brains – a 300 per cent increase – which meant larger heads. The result was that human babies had to be born more prematurely than any other species, and so needed parental protection for much longer. This made parenting more demanding among humans than any other species, the work of two people rather than one. Hence the very rare phenomenon among mammals, of pair bonding, unlike other species where the male contribution tends to end with the act of impregnation. Among most primates, fathers don't even recognise their children let alone care for them. Elsewhere in the animal kingdom motherhood is almost universal but fatherhood is rare.

So what emerged along with the human person was the union of the biological mother and father to care for their child. Thus far nature, but then came culture, and the third surprise.

It seems that among hunter gatherers, pair bonding was the norm. Then came agriculture, and economic surplus, and cities and civilisation, and for the first time sharp inequalities began to emerge between rich and poor, powerful and powerless. The great ziggurats of Mesopotamia and pyramids of ancient Egypt, with their broad base and narrow top, were monumental statements in stone of a hierarchical society in which the few had power over the many. And the most obvious expression of power among alpha males whether human or primate, is to dominate access to fertile

women and thus maximise the handing on of your genes to the next generation. Hence polygamy, which exists in 95 per cent of mammal species and 75 per cent of cultures known to anthropology. Polygamy is the ultimate expression of inequality because it means that many males never get the chance to have a wife and child. And sexual envy has been, throughout history, among animals as well as humans, a prime driver of violence.

That is what makes the first chapter of Genesis so revolutionary with its statement that every human being, regardless of class, colour, culture or creed, is in the image and likeness of God himself. We know that in the ancient world it was rulers, kings, emperors and pharaohs who were held to be in the image of God. So what Genesis was saying was that we are all royalty. We each have equal dignity in the kingdom of faith under the sovereignty of God.

From this it follows that we each have an equal right to form a marriage and have children, which is why, regardless of how we read the story of Adam and Eve – and there are differences between Jewish and Christian readings – the norm presupposed by that story is: one woman, one man. Or as the Bible itself says: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Monogamy did not immediately become the norm, even within the world of the Bible. But many of its most famous stories, about the tension between Sarah and Hagar, or Leah and Rachel and their children, or David and Bathsheba, or Solomon’s many wives, are all critiques that point the way to monogamy.

And there is a deep connection between monotheism and monogamy, just as there is, in the opposite direction, between idolatry and adultery. Monotheism and monogamy are about the all-embracing relationship between I and Thou, myself and one other, be it a human, or the divine, Other.

What makes the emergence of monogamy unusual is that it is normally the case that the values of a society are those imposed on it by the ruling class. And the ruling class in any hierarchical society stands to gain from promiscuity and polygamy, both of which multiply the chances of my genes being handed on to the next generation. From monogamy the rich and powerful lose and the poor and powerless gain. So the return of monogamy goes against the normal grain of social change and was a real triumph for the equal dignity of all. Every bride and every groom are royalty; every home a palace when furnished with love.

The fourth remarkable development was the way this transformed the moral life. We’ve all become familiar with the work of evolutionary biologists using computer simulations and the iterated prisoners’ dilemma to explain why reciprocal altruism exists among all social animals. We behave to others as we would wish them to behave to us, and we respond to them as they respond to us. As C S Lewis pointed out in his book *The Abolition of Man*, reciprocity is the Golden Rule shared by all the great civilizations.

What was new and remarkable in the Hebrew Bible was the idea that love, not just fairness, is the driving principle of the moral life. Three loves. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might.” “Love your neighbour as yourself.” And, repeated no less than 36 times in the Mosaic books, “Love the stranger because you know what it feels like to be a stranger.” Or to put it another way: just as God created the natural world in love and forgiveness, so we are charged with creating the social world in love and forgiveness. And that love is a flame lit in marriage and the family. Morality is the love between husband and wife, parent and child, extended outward to the world.

The fifth development shaped the entire structure of Jewish experience. In ancient Israel an originally secular form of agreement, called a covenant, was taken and transformed into a new way of thinking about the relationship between God and humanity, in the case of Noah, and between God and a people in the case of Abraham and later the Israelites at Mount Sinai. A covenant is like a

marriage. It is a mutual pledge of loyalty and trust between two or more people, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, to work together to achieve together what neither can achieve alone. And there is one thing even God cannot achieve alone, which is to live within the human heart. That needs us.

So the Hebrew word *emunah*, wrongly translated as faith, really means faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, steadfastness, not walking away even when the going gets tough, trusting the other and honouring the other's trust in us. What covenant did, and we see this in almost all the prophets, was to understand the relationship between us and God in terms of the relationship between bride and groom, wife and husband. Love thus became not only the basis of morality but also of theology. In Judaism faith is a marriage. Rarely was this more beautifully stated than by Hosea when he said in the name of God:

I will betroth you to me forever;

I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will know the Lord.

Jewish men say those words every weekday morning as we wind the strap of our tefillin around our finger like a wedding ring. Each morning we renew our marriage with God.

This led to a sixth and quite subtle idea that truth, beauty, goodness, and life itself, do not exist in any one person or entity but in the "between," what Martin Buber called *Das Zwischenmenschliche*, the interpersonal, the counterpoint of speaking and listening, giving and receiving. Throughout the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic literature, the vehicle of truth is conversation. In revelation God speaks and asks us to listen. In prayer we speak and ask God to listen. There is never only one voice. In the Bible the prophets argue with God. In the Talmud rabbis argue with one another. In fact I sometimes think the reason God chose the Jewish people was because He loves a good argument. Judaism is a conversation scored for many voices, never more passionately than in the Song of Songs, a duet between a woman and a man, the beloved and her lover, that Rabbi Akiva called the holy of holies of religious literature.

The prophet Malachi calls the male priest the guardian of the law of truth. The book of Proverbs says of the woman of worth that "the law of loving kindness is on her tongue." It is that conversation between male and female voices, between truth and love, justice and mercy, law and forgiveness, that frames the spiritual life. In biblical times each Jew had to give a half shekel to the Temple to remind us that we are only half. There are some cultures that teach that we are nothing. There are others that teach that we are everything. The Jewish view is that we are half and we need to open ourselves to another if we are to become whole.

All this led to the seventh outcome, that in Judaism the home and the family became the central setting of the life of faith. In the only verse in the Hebrew Bible to explain why God chose Abraham, He says: "I have known him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." Abraham was chosen not to rule an empire, command an army, perform miracles or deliver prophecies, but simply to be a parent. In one of the most famous lines in Judaism, which we say every day and night, Moses commands, "You shall teach these things repeatedly to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house or when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up." Parents are to be educators, education is the conversation between the generations, and the first school is the home.

So Jews became an intensely family oriented people, and it was this that saved us from tragedy. After the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70, Jews were scattered throughout the world, everywhere a minority, everywhere without rights, suffering some of the worst persecutions ever known by a people and yet Jews survived because they never lost three things: their sense of family, their sense of community and their faith.

And they were renewed every week especially on Shabbat, the day of rest when we give our marriages and families what they most need and are most starved of in the contemporary world, namely time. I once produced a television documentary for the BBC on the state of family life in Britain, and I took the person who was then Britain's leading expert on child care, Penelope Leach, to a Jewish primary school on a Friday morning.

There she saw the children enacting in advance what they would see that evening around the family table. There were the five year old mother and father blessing the five year old children with the five year old grandparents looking on. She was fascinated by this whole institution, and she asked the children what they most enjoyed about the Sabbath. One five year old boy turned to her and said, "It's the only night of the week when daddy doesn't have to rush off." As we walked away from the school when the filming was over she turned to me and said, "Chief Rabbi, that Sabbath of yours is saving their parents' marriages."

So that is one way of telling the story, a Jewish way, beginning with the birth of sexual reproduction, then the unique demands of human parenting, then the eventual triumph of monogamy as a fundamental statement of human equality, followed by the way marriage shaped our vision of the moral and religious life as based on love and covenant and faithfulness, even to the point of thinking of truth as a conversation between lover and beloved. Marriage and the family are where faith finds its home and where the Divine Presence lives in the love between husband and wife, parent and child. What then has changed? Here's one way of putting it. I wrote a book a few years ago about religion and science and I summarised the difference between them in two sentences. "Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean." And that's a way of thinking about culture also. Does it put things together or does it take things apart?

What made the traditional family remarkable, a work of high religious art, is what it brought together: sexual drive, physical desire, friendship, companionship, emotional kinship and love, the begetting of children and their protection and care, their early education and induction into an identity and a history. Seldom has any institution woven together so many different drives and desires, roles and responsibilities. It made sense of the world and gave it a human face, the face of love.

For a whole variety of reasons, some to do with medical developments like birth control, in vitro fertilisation and other genetic interventions, some to do with moral change like the idea that we are free to do whatever we like so long as it does not harm others, some to do with a transfer of responsibilities from the individual to the state, and other and more profound changes in the culture of the West, almost everything that marriage once brought together has now been split apart. Sex has been divorced from love, love from commitment, marriage from having children, and having children from responsibility for their care.

The result is that in Britain in 2012, 47.5 per cent of children were born outside marriage, expected to become a majority in 2016. Fewer people are marrying, those who are, are marrying later, and 42 per cent of marriages end in divorce. Nor is cohabitation a substitute for marriage. The average length of cohabitation in Britain and the United States is less than two years. The result is a sharp increase among young people of eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, stress related syndromes, depression and actual and attempted suicides. The collapse of marriage has created a new form of poverty concentrated among single parent families, and of these, the main burden is born by women, who in 2011 headed 92 per cent of single parent households. In Britain today more than a million children will grow up with no contact whatsoever with their fathers.

This is creating a divide within societies the like of which has not been seen since Disraeli spoke of "two nations" a century and a half ago. Those who are privileged to grow up in stable loving association with the two people who brought them into being will, on average, be healthier physically and emotionally. They will do better at school and at work. They will have more successful relationships, be happier and live longer.

And yes, there are many exceptions. But the injustice of it all cries out to heaven. It will go down in history as one of the tragic instances of what Friedrich Hayek called “the fatal conceit” that somehow we know better than the wisdom of the ages, and can defy the lessons of biology and history. No one surely wants to go back to the narrow prejudices of the past.

This week, in Britain, a new film opens, telling the story of one of the great minds of the twentieth century, Alan Turing, the Cambridge mathematician who laid the philosophical foundations of computing and artificial intelligence, and helped win the war by breaking the German naval code Enigma. After the war, Turing was arrested and tried for homosexual behaviour, underwent chemically induced castration, and died at the age of 41 by cyanide poisoning, thought by many to have committed suicide. That is a world to which we should never return.

But our compassion for those who choose to live differently should not inhibit us from being advocates for the single most humanising institution in history. The family, man, woman, and child, is not one lifestyle choice among many. It is the best means we have yet discovered for nurturing future generations and enabling children to grow in a matrix of stability and love. It is where we learn the delicate choreography of relationship and how to handle the inevitable conflicts within any human group. It is where we first take the risk of giving and receiving love. It is where one generation passes on its values to the next, ensuring the continuity of a civilization. For any society, the family is the crucible of its future, and for the sake of our children’s future, we must be its defenders.

Since this is a religious gathering, let me, if I may, end with a piece of biblical exegesis. The story of the first family, the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, is not generally regarded as a success. Whether or not we believe in original sin, it did not end happily. After many years of studying the text I want to suggest a different reading.

The story ends with three verses that seem to have no connection with one another. No sequence. No logic. In Genesis 3: 19 God says to the man: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Then in the next verse we read: “The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all life.” And in the next, “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”

What is the connection here? Why did God telling the man that he was mortal lead him to give his wife a new name? And why did that act seem to change God’s attitude to both of them, so that He performed an act of tenderness, by making them clothes, almost as if He had partially forgiven them? Let me also add that the Hebrew word for “skin” is almost indistinguishable from the Hebrew word for “light,” so that Rabbi Meir, the great sage of the early second century, read the text as saying that God made for them “garments of light.” What did he mean?

If we read the text carefully, we see that until now the first man had given his wife a purely generic name. He called her ishah, woman. Recall what he said when he first saw her: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken from man.” For him she was a type, not a person. He gave her a noun, not a name. What is more he defines her as a derivative of himself: something taken from man. She is not yet for him someone other, a person in her own right. She is merely a kind of reflection of himself.

As long as the man thought he was immortal, he ultimately needed no one else. But now he knew he was mortal. He would one day die and return to dust. There was only one way in which something of him would live on after his death. That would be if he had a child. But he could not have a child on his own. For that he needed his wife. She alone could give birth. She alone could mitigate his mortality. And not because she was like him but precisely because she was unlike him. At that moment she ceased to be, for him, a type, and became a person in her own right. And a person has a proper name. That is what he gave her: the name Chavah, “Eve,” meaning, “giver of life.”

At that moment, as they were about to leave Eden and face the world as we know it, a place of darkness, Adam gave his wife the first gift of love, a personal name. And at that moment, God responded to them both in love, and made them garments to clothe their nakedness, or as Rabbi Meir put it, “garments of light.”

And so it has been ever since, that when a man and woman turn to one another in a bond of faithfulness, God robes them in garments of light, and we come as close as we will ever get to God himself, bringing new life into being, turning the prose of biology into the poetry of the human spirit, redeeming the darkness of the world by the radiance of love.

[ends]