

## AGENDA 2.1.1

# LCA Bishop

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand has existed as a united, independent synod for 52 years. We are Lutheran because we confess our Christian faith according to Scripture and the Book of Concord (1580). We are united because under the guidance of the Holy Spirit farsighted, committed people brought our factions together and welded us into a single church body. We are independent because we are not under any external organisation. We are synod because we work together to set our priorities in ministry and mission.

While primarily a community of faith and we centre our life on worship and service, in addition the LCA has legal, financial, property and human resource responsibilities. Our Constitution makes us a legal entity with all the structures, authorities and processes necessary to operate in the everyday world. As a 'legal person' the church can sign contracts, own property, open bank accounts, employ staff and can also be taken to court, just like everyone else in society.

Our 19th Synod in 2018 will involve both these realities. Matters of faith and salvation will be at the heart of our gathering. Each day prayer and worship will be central. In the mornings we will celebrate Holy Communion as one family in Christ. Much of our business will be about doctrine. But we will also need to address things like constitutions, structure, governance, finance and elections. God willing, the decisions of Synod will set the priorities and work plans of the LCA for the next three years, and maybe beyond.

The LCA has marked the years 2016 (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LCA), 2017 (500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation) and 2018 under the 50.500 theme 'Faith, Freedom, Future'. 2018 is the year of the future, and this Convention will be a significant moment in that year. 52 years on, the generation which brought the LCA into being is no longer attending its meetings. The next two generations have taken their places at the microphones and are casting their votes. We respect our predecessors, and just as they in their time, so we in ours must prepare to hand the church on to those who come after us. In this context I note with sadness the passing in 2017 of Dr Les Grope, the second LCA General President.

I pray that at this 19<sup>th</sup> Convention our experience may be that described in Acts 9:31: *The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria now had a time of peace and kept on worshipping the Lord. The church became stronger, as the Holy Spirit encouraged it and helped it grow.* (CEV)

## 2. THE CHURCH

### 2.1 THE LCA TODAY

The church isn't a perfect society, shielded from the world around it. That's clear in our faith. Jesus Christ did not set himself apart. He was God who lived among us in this world and who died for us as real flesh and blood.

So as God is in the world and is for us, we his church are in the world and for it. Faith in God requires us to serve the world in love, give our lives for it, immerse ourselves in it, and risk carrying the light of Christ into places where angels fear to tread.

Faith involves dangerous work. The New Testament shows that clearly. The greatest danger, however, comes from within. Without realising it we fall prey to the same temptation as the world – to replace God with ourselves. In the Large Catechism Martin Luther explains: *'That to*

*which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.*<sup>1</sup> The church must take care not to cling to its power. That is partly what made the Reformation so potent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At that time the church tried to conceal its sin behind a shallow pretence of holiness. More recently, in our century, abuse scandals have rocked churches across the world. The court cases that follow are ripping apart any pretences the church might have had left. Society has ripped away the veil of secrecy. People are now free to say what was previously unsayable. We now have to face up and take the consequences. The LCA has a realistic approach to this environment. We are committed, under God to do our best to prevent all forms of abuse. We will practice higher levels of accountability in all our operations. It means additional checks and balances, policies and procedures, rules and regulations.

Although these new requirements can appear to be onerous, we need them if we are to continue in mission and ministry. We need to ask the hard questions and leave less to chance. Getting the balance right is difficult, and it will take time. All of us find it difficult. Some are grateful for this work, others complain. A few openly oppose these new standards, wondering what has become of the church they once knew.

I will give you one example of what that means. In 2015 the LCA Synod resolved to conduct a campaign to combat domestic violence. We launched the campaign in late 2017, drawing materials from several resources, including an organisation called White Ribbon Australia. Unbeknown to us, in mid-2017 White Ribbon had posted an opinion on late term abortions on its website. There was a storm of protest and they took the opinion down, but it was too late. Because of it a pastor told me he was binning the whole LCA campaign. That's extremely sad because he arbitrarily swept away the good with the bad (Matthew 13:24–30). His personal decision meant the people of his parish do not know of their church's work to combat domestic violence in marriages and families. Those parishioners will then quite likely complain that the church is unloving and does nothing to help them and their loved ones in the distress of domestic violence.

This example, and others like it, shows how interconnected we are in the modern world. An emerging phenomenon, however, seems to be that as we become more connected by technology, we can also become the more isolated. We start to select and listen only to the voices we want to hear. Instead of engaging with difference among our local flesh and blood neighbours, we begin selectively talking to like-minded people hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away, sometimes in other countries. Sometimes, in the isolation of forms of electronic communication we even talk down our own church, forgetting the explanation to the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment, *'We should fear and love God, and so we should not tell lies about our neighbour, nor betray, slander, or defame him, but should apologize for him, speak well of him, and interpret charitably all that he does.'*<sup>2</sup>

It's wrong to stick labels on others as 'confessional' or 'liberal', as though people are simply binary. The reality is far more complex. Labels just make it easier to defame and abuse another person rather than love them. This is not the way of Christ.

In 2017, Nadia Bolz-Weber, a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was guest at the Australian Conference on Lutheran Education in Adelaide. She gave a keynote on the Reformation which was a conference highlight. One person asked whether she was glad that 'conservatives' were leaving her church because of its 'progressive' stance? Did that make life

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<sup>1</sup> Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* (p. 365). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

<sup>2</sup> Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* (p. 343). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

easier for her? She responded with evident sadness, grieving their departure. As a bird needs both wings to fly, she said, the church needs both its wings to be and to do what God designed to it be and do.

Through baptismal grace we are all being reborn, washed clean, every day, just as God promises. Some mornings we might not make it past the bathroom door before the dirt sticks again, but God doesn't give up on us. Faith is a power, an ability, which is not of this world. If you ask me why I have confidence in the church, and hope in its future, this is why. It's not ours, it's God's, and that means it's something else entirely. We express it best in worship. God expresses it best when he gives us his Son – in the Word, in baptism, in Holy Communion, and in a myriad of ways that maybe you know in the private spaces of your heart.

## **2.2 THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AND MEN**

So much has been and is still being said on this matter. It will be on the business of Convention once again following the decision of the last Convention to have the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations prepare a draft doctrinal statement. 20 congregations have submitted proposals that the LCA admit both women and men to the office of the ministry.

A key underlying issue has long been how we read and interpret Scripture – hermeneutics. That's despite our very strong statement that we accept, *'without reservation, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.'*<sup>3</sup>

The Bible is a life-giving book, and we don't read it in a vacuum. As humans we always bring a set of presuppositions, which must be open to challenge. The Bible speaks into a real world situation. If we turn it into a textbook then we stop listening for the living, breathing Word of God and the whole practice of faith quickly becomes a legalistic framework of rules and regulations. Textbooks are a product of rationalistic humanism, with an answer for everything. Scripture is the living God speaking his living Word to creatures and a world whom he loves, a word of love.

So I guess that is what I will be listening for as, yet again, we approach the question (which to some is not a question at all) at this General Convention. As I have said at some meetings in recent times, it is not just what we decide that matters to me, but how and why we decide it.

At Convention we will be wise to vote on a proposal for change, as we did in 2015. If we were to vote on a proposal for the current teaching and fail to achieve the 66.6% majority required *'for a matter of doctrine deemed to be the official position of the Church'*<sup>4</sup> it would leave us in an invidious position. Again, as last time, I remind delegates that only one proposal on a matter may be brought forward, except under very specific and unusual circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

## **2.3 RECRUITMENT, SUPPLY AND DEPLOYMENT OF PASTORS**

Statistics show that we have a shortage of pastors (21) relative to parishes with the ability to call. At the present rate of attrition and replacement, that could climb to 89 by 2023 and 129 by 2029. The forecast allows for the increasing number of calls to Specific Ministry Pastors, but does not take into account pastoral calls beyond parishes, such as schools, aged care, and military chaplaincies.

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<sup>3</sup> LCA Constitution, Article 2. Confession, paragraph 1

<sup>4</sup> LCA By-Laws 7.3.28.3

<sup>5</sup> LCA By-Laws 7.3.19

If these forecasts are accurate, we need on average of 12 new 'General Ministry Pastors' per year just to supply our parishes. The current average rate is 4 and falling and the median age of our pastors is 56.

What is the Holy Spirit telling us through these figures? The College of Bishops has been considering this, as have the leadership and staff of Australian Lutheran College (ALC) and the General Church Council (GCC). Many Synod delegates who have been involved in the call process will have felt the pinch of finding the 'right' pastor for your ministry setting.

The training, supply and calling of pastors is an issue for all of us, and not just a single department or organisation. God calls pastors from the wider membership of the church – they are your brothers, cousins, nephews (and sometimes these days uncles and fathers), friends, and fellow church members.

We have work to do, but not out of panic. LCA trends are similar to those of other churches. Ask any Catholic parishioner about the supply of priests, or members of the Uniting or Anglican churches who come from parishes, particularly in the country, which cannot obtain or afford a minister. The general decline in vocations should not surprise us. Society encourages emerging adults to qualify for careers that will bring advancement in promotion and income. The ministry of the LCA, however, has a 'flat' structure. A graduate pastor receives the same remuneration as an experienced pastor of many years, whatever work he is doing. The factors that attract people to train for the ministry are not those commonly valued and promoted by society. The proportion of graduate pastors taking up a second or third career in ministry is also higher than it used to be. Pastors are graduating at an older age. To date the oldest ordination age of a graduate pastor is 64. For Specific Ministry Pastors that figure has occasionally reached the mid-70s and even into the early 80s.

I have included these realities to affirm that we share this issue together, whether urban or rural, large or small, single or multi place, regional or remote, parish, school, aged care, or something else. As a worshipping, sacramental community we need to share our pastors. We must carefully consider how we deploy them, what we expect them to be and do, and how we can become less 'pastor dependent' in some things. The supply of pastors, while a human dilemma, cannot be 'fixed' by purely human solutions. Jesus told us to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest (Matthew 9:37). Is this the lesson we are to learn?

In summary, it will help if we:

- cultivate generosity of spirit towards the supply and utilisation of our pastors;
- are not overly protective of our congregation and parish boundaries;
- think flexibly, creatively and collaboratively about pastoral supply;
- encourage lay people to maximise their service to the church;
- prepare our congregations to embrace a future that will be different from the past;
- look outside our own patches and work together for the good of the whole;
- enquire about how we are using our resources to the best effect; and
- are positive and hopeful about the ministry of the gospel and serving people.

There are many other things to say about the church, but space does not allow them in this report. My desire for the church is that we focus on the basics, our first love as Lutherans, which is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and sharing that good news with a dying world.

To this end I encourage all our congregations, ministries, members and pastors to foster the regular study of the Bible in private, at home and in group settings. It really isn't that difficult. Just read it, reflect on it, talk about it, and let the living Word of God speak into your situations, into your hearts, and into your communities. Let's model that which we want our world, and our church, to be.

### **3. INDIGENOUS LUTHERANS**

In the late 1990s, Dr Lance Steicke, the LCA's third President, conducted a rite of reconciliation, a sorry event, with Indigenous participants at a Synod. At the time the church produced some excellent materials, including a report 'We're all people' and a video 'Out of the shadows'. We slowly forgot them, and didn't follow through on this initiative as fully as we might have.

Recently the leadership has been reviewing what we did then and where we are now. The LCA continues to work hard in the complex and demanding ministries around Central Australia, Cape York, and South Australia's West Coast. LCA ministries are right there where it counts, and we have a good grasp of the problems and the possibilities. Nevertheless, overall our approach is not coordinated, and we have 'siloes' our various ministries so that they find it difficult to collaborate and share what they know.

After all these decades we continue to have a noticeable lack of Indigenous leadership, at least beyond the local and the immediate field of work. LCA Synods, councils and committees proceed largely without Indigenous participation. We rarely pause to ask our Indigenous members what they think, even if we had the mechanisms to do so. And yet a remarkably large percentage of Lutherans in Australia are Indigenous. Because they are not in 'constituted' congregations, and because English may be a second or even fourth language, it takes special acumen, and a great deal of time, to listen and to hear the message.

So we can easily put it into the 'too hard' basket and just get on with business. In the end, however, that's not enough. To be a truly local church, and not just a European transplant into the southern hemisphere, we must include, and allow ourselves to be changed by, Indigenous voices.

Recently there have been several commendable efforts to validate Indigenous representation at Synods – in other words, what wider society would call 'recognition'. Only a few congregations with substantial Aboriginal membership can currently send voting delegates to a Synod. Attempts at finding a way to widening this representation, however, have so far ended up in circular arguments. Our structure dictates that congregations are the members of the church. If you aren't a constituted and recognised congregation you aren't an 'official' member, at least not for the purpose of voting. Simple as that.

One solution, novel and so far untried by us, but proven in other churches, would be to rewrite the Constitution to separate the functions of the LCA as a church and as a legal entity. We need to be incorporated to own property, be sued, and all that other stuff. We don't need it, however, to be a worshipping community, to conduct ministry and mission, and to preach the gospel! If we separated these constitutionally two then some of the current barriers to Indigenous recognition might cease to exist.

Another issue, which I have only just begun to think about, is the reality that introducing a stronger, identifiable Indigenous voice into the affairs of the LCA will substantially change the way we do things. In other words, we must be willing to receive from each other, as well as to give, and Indigenous Australians have many gifts to give their non-Indigenous fellow believers.

So there is work to be done on this, and it's the work of a lifetime. In the short to medium term we have searched for a mechanism to get us on the road to continue the journey we began in the 1990s. We have begun work on developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, and a proposal will come before Synod to resource the development of such a plan. We have already begun a series of deep consultations, and with Neville Otto have gathered a steering group of Indigenous and

leadership representatives. It's slow work but extremely rewarding and worthwhile, and I hope you will give it your support.

#### **4. AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE**

ALC will be submitting its own report to Convention, but one of my duties as your bishop is 'Official Visitor' to ALC.<sup>6</sup>

ALC continues to be the largest single project undertaken by the LCA. It reflects the high priority our church has always had on training and equipping church workers in Lutheran theology and spirituality.

ALC is operating in a more difficult and competitive environment than ever. It is learning to be agile and responsive in delivering educational outcomes. It is creating opportunities on-line and regionally for both higher education and vocational theological education. ALC is going out to the people.

In 2017 the ALC annual appeal received one of the best responses ever. I take that as a sign that the people of the church continue to support their learning institution despite our challenging environment. Getting back to basics means knowing who we are as Lutherans. ALC provides the best opportunity for us to do just that. Please continue to pray for and support the Principal, the staff, the Board, and most especially the students.

#### **5. INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS**

During the synodical term, the LCA has maintained cordial relations with its international cousins. LCA Mission International has been at the forefront of many of these relationships, particularly in Asia. This synodical term I have participated in the following international engagements:

2015

- Asian Church Leaders Conference, Taiwan
- Conference on Confessional Leadership in the 21st century, Wittenberg Germany

2016

- Lutheran Church Missouri Synod National Convention, Milwaukee USA
- Visit to Church-wide Office, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- Joint commemoration of the Reformation, Lund and Malmö Sweden

2017

- Lutheran World Federation Assembly (LWF), Windhoek Namibia
- Visit of Martin Junge, General Secretary, LWF
- Asian Church Leaders Conference, Manila The Philippines
- Reformation conference and opening of Old Latin School, Wittenberg (ILC/LCMS)

2018

- Visit to Lutheran churches in Thailand and Cambodia, LCA International Mission

In this synodical term, apart from those working with LCA Mission International and Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS), and those undertaking tours such as Lutheran Educators, the following people have represented the LCA internationally:

- Lutheran churches in Asia (LUCAS) (intermittent);
- LWF Global Young Reformers Network: Sam Suke (ecology), Sophie Gerry;
- Mission EineWelt Summer Schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (a number of attendees);

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<sup>6</sup> LCA By-Laws 8.2.1.1.6

- Luther Decade International Seminars in Wittenberg Mark Vainikka; Anthony Price;
- ILC World Seminaries Conference (Dr Stephen Pietsch)
- Visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land: Bishop Michael Fulwood;
- Links with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland through the Suomi Conference.

Elsewhere:

- Pastor George Samiec continues to serve in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England;
- Pastor Greg Schiller has returned to Australia after serving with the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea as a seminary lecturer;
- Michael Hauser serves as a lay lecturer serving with ELCPNG;
- Margaret Mickan has retired as Lutheran Bible Translator;
- Hanna Schulz serves as a Bible Translator in PNG with Wycliffe Bible Translators;
- Chey Mattner (formerly ALWS Executive Director) now serves as Director of Operations for the Department of World Service, LWF in Geneva, Switzerland.

The LCA has formally expressed church-to-church relationships with Papua New Guinea and the Lutheran Church—Canada.

## **5.1 LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION**

The LCA is an Associate Member of the LWF. While we participate in events and pay a membership fee, we are unable to hold office or vote at meetings.

The most active sector of LWF for us is the Asia region, where we enjoy many productive bi- and multi-lateral mission partnerships.

Further afield we have participated in a number of LWF activities. The most recent was a trial bi-lateral exchange arranged by the LWF between the LCA and the Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina/Uruguay/Paraguay), attended by Pastor Andrew and Jodi Brook

Every seven years the LWF holds a global Assembly. In May 2017 it was held in Windhoek, Namibia. LCA attendees were Glenice Hartwich (International Mission), Chey Mattner (ALWS), Pastor Matt Anker (Omatala speaker) and me as Bishop.

In July 2017 we received a visit from the LWF General Secretary, Rev Dr Martin Junge, and his wife, Marietta. The LCA hosted them in Wellington, Sydney, Alice Springs, Adelaide, and Shepparton.

Proposals are before this Convention that the LCA seek full membership in the LWF. The General Pastors Conference recommends that the LCA commission a study of the implications, in tandem with seeking full membership in the International Lutheran Council (ILC).

## **5.2 INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

The LCA is an Associate Member of the ILC. As for LWF, it means we participate in events and pay a membership fee, but cannot hold office or vote at meetings.

Unfortunately the dates of the ILC's Triennial Conventions in 2015 and 2018 have clashed with the LCA Convention of Synod. This year, however, Bishop emeritus Mark Lieschke is attending in Brussels on our behalf.

Proposals are also before this convention that the LCA seek full membership in the ILC, as with LWF (see LWF above).

## **6. DOMESTIC ECUMENICAL RELATIONS**

### **6.1 NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA (NCCA)**

The LCA has been a member of the NCCA ([www.ncca.org.au](http://www.ncca.org.au)) since 1998. In that time we have provided two Presidents (Dr Lance Steicke and Dr Michael Semmler) and one General Secretary (Pastor John Henderson). We have continued to provide personnel to serve on various commissions and task groups as required:

- Faith and Unity Commission ([www.ncca.org.au/index.php/departments/faith-unity](http://www.ncca.org.au/index.php/departments/faith-unity))—Pastor Andrew Brook
- Safe Churches Program ([www.ncca.org.au/index.php/departments/safe-church-program](http://www.ncca.org.au/index.php/departments/safe-church-program))—Tim Ross (LCA PS Manager)
- Act for Peace—This is the NCCA's Aid and Development arm (formerly Christian World Service). Members of the LCA will know little about this, as we remain committed to ALWS. Nevertheless, until his departure in February 2017, ALWS Executive Director Chey Mattner served on the board of Act for Peace, and from August 2018 Jamieson Davies will replace him.
- Eco-mission project ([www.ncca.org.au/index.php/departments/eco-mission](http://www.ncca.org.au/index.php/departments/eco-mission))—Dr Andrew Ruddell.
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission—In the last term this commission has not been active.

I have been a Director of NCCA Ltd since 2016, when the NCCA adopted a new structure of a board, quarterly Assemblies, and a triennial Forum. It is still determining the success of this new structure in engaging the churches and achieving the Council's objects.

Over the last several years operations that were once distinctive of the NCCA have not functioned – the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Council, the Gender Network, and the Youth Network. Others continue with varying degrees of effectiveness – the Faith and Unity Commission, and the Social Justice Network. Still others are growing and developing – the Safe Church Program, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program, and the Churches Refugee Task Force. Act for Peace has grown much stronger and in 2018 the NCCA formed a separate company for this operation.

The NCCA has few staff. Ms Liz Stone is Acting General Secretary since the departure of Sister Elizabeth Delaney at the end of 2017. The President is Anglican Bishop Phillip Huggins.

## **6.2 NATIONAL CHURCH LEADERS**

National Church Leaders is an informal group that meet infrequently. Since 2015 I know of only one meeting, which was in Melbourne. Timing issues meant I could not attend.

## **2. PUBLIC THEOLOGY**

Since 2016 Mr Nick Schwarz has assisted me in keeping abreast of public affairs, and making occasional comment or submissions.

Topics we have addressed so far include:

1. Aboriginal affairs – eg NAIDOC, National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week.
2. Aboriginal Lutherans – eg 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hermannsburg
3. Freedom of religion and faith – eg a submission to the recent government review
4. Same-sex marriage – various statements and advice
5. Domestic violence
6. Sexual abuse – National Redress Scheme
7. Families – eg resources for a month of prayer and fasting
8. Euthanasia – eg the debates in South Australia and Victoria
9. Abortion – assisting the Queensland District submission to the Law Reform Commission
10. Religious programming on the ABC – a letter to the managing director and chairman about cutbacks in this area
11. Refugees – eg statements for refugee week, the sanctuary movement, Manus Island

12. Principled overseas aid by the Australian government – participated in a letter to the Australian Foreign Minister.
  13. Citizenship – assisting LCA Cross-Cultural ministry submission on the proposed Citizenship Amendment Bill (Australia)
  14. Multiculturalism – eg Harmony Day
  15. Climate change
  16. ANZAC Day
  17. Remembrance Day
  18. Australia Day
  19. Modern Slavery – eg Australian Parliamentary enquiry
  20. Terror attacks – eg Paris (2015), Egypt (2015), Indonesia (2016, 2018), Europe (2016)
- I have also released messages on Christmas, Easter, Holy Week, Lutheran Renewal, New Zealand earthquakes, transitions for school leavers, Synod, and the General Pastors Conference (2x).

### **3. LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION**

#### **8.1 GENERAL CHURCH COUNCIL**

During this synodical period I have once again served as the chairperson of the GCC. In writing about the GCC I don't believe I can improve on what I wrote in 2015:

*The GCC is your 'Synod between conventions'. A volunteer board, largely constructed on representational principles, it nevertheless operates at a consistently demanding level. Your church councillors are a gifted, dedicated and committed group of people, who give a great deal to the church. Normally, they are heavily involved in local and district affairs as well as at the national level. They have a deep understanding and appreciation of the LCA in its many manifestations. Most of them travel some distance, some even internationally, to attend meetings. GCC does hold regular teleconferences, but when the chips are down there is no substitute for being in the same room together.*

*Very few people appreciate the complexity of the GCC's role and the sheer volume of business it must process. I express my gratitude to each member of the GCC for their love of Jesus, commitment to their church, and patient compassion for the new bishop as he finds his way through the multiplicity of issues on the often very lengthy agenda.*

I once again must add my thanks to the Executive Officer of the Church, Peter Schirmer, and his staff. Peter's calm leadership, his partnership in the gospel, quiet assurance and constant attention to staying on track in completing tasks are invaluable.

I also acknowledge Assistant Bishop Andrew Pfeiffer, who has stepped in for me a number of times, usually at a critical juncture. Andrew has been a great support, and his chairing of the recent General Pastors Conference was exemplary.

#### **8.2 THE COLLEGE OF BISHOPS (COB)**

The last period has seen the following changes

- Bishop Greg Pietsch (Vic-Tas) replaced by Bishop Lester Priebbenow
- Bishop Greg Pfeiffer (WA, retired) replaced by Bishop Michael Fulwood
- Bishop Mark Lieschke (NSW, retired) replaced by Bishop James Haak
- Assistant Bishop Andrew Pfeiffer elected in 2015

Bishop Paul Smith (Qld) came onto the CoB just prior to the last General Convention. As a result of these changes the CoB has a significantly new look. I thank all the bishops, both those who have left and those who have arrived, for their unwavering support and encouragement, and the considerable work they do and the sacrificial way in which they serve the church, the personal costs of which others do not generally see.

### **8.3 CHURCHWIDE OFFICE**

Briefly, in closing, I acknowledge my co-workers in the LCA Churchwide office, full-time, part-time and volunteer, located in North Adelaide and across the church. I especially thank Larissa Helbig, my Executive Assistant for her untiring and patient work, and Debbie Venz, LCA Business Manager, who gives far more to her work than most realise. All LCA staff work willingly and often beyond the call of duty. The LCA is a richer, better place for your service among us.

Respectfully submitted,  
Pastor John Henderson  
Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia  
Adelaide, 17 July 2018