

Letter to members of the Lutheran Church of Australia

From St Stephen's (Adelaide) Working Party on Women's Ordination

We believe that the debate on women's ordination (WO) at this year's National Convention (2015) is a pivotal moment in the life of the LCA - a 'now or never' moment.

In recent years, until the election of Bishop Henderson, there was limited open debate on WO.

With Bishop Henderson, discussion has been encouraged and an atmosphere of listening has been established. However, achieving a 66%+1 majority on this matter, which has been deemed to be a significant theological matter, remains a huge task. It is probably more difficult than achieving change through notoriously difficult Australian national referenda where a majority in a majority of states is required. (at least 51% of the vote in 51% of the states).

While the intent for setting the goal at 66%+1 on significant theological matters was to avoid schism, it is now obvious that this goal has not and cannot achieve unity. The LCA is divided on this matter with un-numbered members lost due to the LCA's inability to settle the matter. The seemingly unachievable target has been the cause of despair that the matter can ever be resolved.

While we may now have a genuine, open conversation on women's ordination, if the required vote is not achieved, then women's ordination will be quashed into the foreseeable future.

After generations of debate, national Bible studies, CTICR studies and now freedom of debate, this moment is the pivotal moment when women's ordination might finally be approved. However, if it does not go through, we believe that the consequences for the LCA will be profound. Some of our members have expressed the desire to see women ordained in their life time. We know that if it fails this time, their wish will go unfulfilled. If there is no change under these improved circumstances, there simply will be no hope for women's ordination in the LCA. Under such circumstances, those people who have been encouraged to wait 'just a little longer' will no longer have reason to wait 'just a little longer'.

With the ongoing loss of members who support the Ordination of Women, the make-up of the LCA will increasingly become less hopeful on this issue.

This moment is pivotal in the LCA. It is a "now or never" moment. If Women's Ordination does not achieve the huge vote needed, the signal will have been given that the LCA is incapable of change on this matter and a

significant portion of the LCA's forward-thinking membership will no longer have the patience for waiting for change.

Convention delegates have the option of preserving the LCA as planned at Union in 1966, long before women achieved any semblance of equality, or of imagining what our Church might become in this 21st Century, with all its hopes and challenges.

While there will be continued fear-mongering, there is nothing to fear in voting for Women's Ordination, for it is consistent with the gospel and the confessions. Most world Lutheran synods will attest to that. We can live together in difference under Christ and under the Confessions. In this increasingly multi-cultural Australian society, with people from all corners of the world, we need not fear diversity, for in our difference there is richness and strength. There is however danger in narrow conformity, which may continue the LCA's decline into insularity and insignificance.

This 'now or never' moment could well be one that will be celebrated with our children's children as we continue to imagine the positive influence that Christ may have through our Church on Australian society.