

Appendix I: Review of the LCA pastor call system

INTRODUCTION

The Review of the Call System was initiated by Resolution 151209 of the 2015 LCA General Convention of Synod:

RESOLVED that the General Convention support the conduct of a review of the LCA call process which will:

1. Identify and examine potential new models for filling pastoral vacancies in congregations with a view to increasing efficiency, transparency and inclusion; and
 2. Include facilitated conversations with congregations as part of the research process
- Outcome: a detailed report of the findings to be delivered to GCC and CoB, which includes recommendations that can be taken by GCC to the 2018 General Convention of Synod.

The General Church Council (GCC) responded to the Synod resolution by engaging Australian Lutheran Institute for Theology and Ethics (ALITE) at Australian Lutheran College (ALC). The principle reviewer was Prof. Wendy Mayer, Associate Dean for Research. The NSW District provided a generous grant to cover the cost of the review.

The review composed three parts.

1. Assessment of Call Process models in other comparable Lutheran churches around the world and in other denominations in Australia.
2. A national online survey of congregations (conducted between 30 November 2017 and 19 February 2018. 115 congregations responded).
3. In person interviews with current and recently retired District Bishops, Directors of Mission, and the Chair of the Vic/Tas District Lay Call Committee (11 interviews were conducted between 22 January and 22 February 2018).

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The GCC received the final report of the Review of the Call System slightly too late for inclusion in the Synod Book of reports. Some of its main conclusions are:

1. The LCA Call Process is at present under some stress. This is due to three main factors:
 - the declining mobility of pastors
 - a small shortfall in the current supply of pastors; and
 - the skill set of the pastors currently available relative to the needs of parishes.

An additional factor pertaining to the Call Process itself continues to be transparency. A possible minor factor is the timeliness of the Call Process.
2. Parishes on the whole believe that the Call Process is inadequate but could be improved (rather than replaced). The deepest level of frustration for parishes pertains to transparency and timing: the status of pastor profiles, the delay in receipt of negative responses by pastors to an issued Call, and the real status of pastors in relation to availability for Call.
3. Bishops and Directors of Mission generally report satisfaction with the current Call Process, but indicate that it could be improved. When pressed on this issue improvements related on the whole to the need to address the three impact factors listed above (mobility, supply, skill set relative to parish needs).
4. The Call Process of the LCA already allows for a variety of practices: an open call via the bishop for expressions of interest by pastors; bishops tapping a pastor in a current Call on the shoulder and asking them to consider a vacant parish that is challenging; parishes asking pastors available for Call whether there are reasons they would not consider a new Call (the opposite of the current standard question); having a dedicated group of lay

volunteers doing the phoning around on behalf of parishes and maintaining a check list of who has been approached and who has indicated genuine interest in being in receipt of a new Call (current practice in the Vic/Tas District).

5. Neither parishes nor bishops and Directors of Mission are aware of the full range of variants available. A number of respondents to the survey reported that the outline of the Call Process provided with the Survey was the first time that they had gained a clear understanding of the Call Process.
6. Expectation management is important for the Call Process to function well and for the reduction of levels of mistrust and frustration.
7. In regard to potential changes to the Call Process, there was overwhelming rejection by lay people, bishops and Directors of Mission to limiting the term of Call, even with the allowance for extension. There was also little enthusiasm for introducing formal interviews of shortlisted candidates or trial sermons prior to a Call meeting.
8. The system itself as a whole suits current LCA ecclesiology and theology. The results of the review do not call for substantive change to the Call Process. By substantive is meant major structural changes. Minor changes can and do need to be made to improve its efficiency.

NEXT STEPS

The GCC will give further consideration to the report and release it to Synod delegates before the General Convention of Synod, along with its initial response to the report's recommendations. The GCC believes that no synodical resolutions are required to enact the recommendations.