



THE GIFT OF GOD

– it's grace that unites us



GUIDELINES FOR RESPECTFUL DEBATE AT GENERAL SYNOD ON THE ISSUE OF ORDINATION

What is different this time?

The debate over the ordination of women and men in the LCA has continued for several decades without any clear resolution. Voting at successive Conventions of Synod has consistently demonstrated a majority of delegates in favour of ordination of men and women but not greater than a two-thirds majority to enact the necessary changes. This indicates that there are two widely held positions on ordination: that of men only; and that of men and women.

Careful and prayerful debate over many years has not produced a broad consensus one way or the other. This reflects the situation globally, where different Lutheran churches have adopted positions for and against the ordination of women.

Many proposals at previous General Synods have been about a winner-take-all proposal: either the whole of the LCA decides that congregations may call women as pastors, or the whole LCA does not decide to allow congregations to call women as pastors.

The 2024 General Synod's 'way forward' motion is different. It acknowledges that there are significant proportions of LCA pastors and congregations who are aligned with different understandings of what the Scriptures say regarding ordination, leading to a theological impasse and that resolution of the ordination issue requires a different approach. The fact that the 2021-23 General Synod motion to develop the 'way forward' motion for the 2024 General Synod passed with a 74% majority suggests that most people in the church are keen to find a way for the issue to be resolved.

One way in which this could be achieved would be to split the church into two separate churches. Instead, the Way Forward process has been tasked by General Synod with exploring if there is a way that the two different views on ordination can both be accommodated within a single church.

So the question underlying the 'way forward' motion is different to that of previous General Synods. It is not, 'Can we agree whether the ordination of women is allowable or not?'. Instead, it acknowledges that there is significant disagreement on that issue, and instead it asks, 'Is there a church structure, which maintains church unity, but also allows two different ordination practices?'

The broad discussion before General Synod on the 'way forward' motion is intended to ensure that the proposed one-church-two-practices structure is the one that is most likely to provide a theological and pastoral home for as many people as possible in the church, while acknowledging different positions on ordination.

So, the goal at General Convention of Synod 2024 is to establish a structure that would be able to achieve this aim. If we are to continue to walk together as one church despite our differences, then it is important that the debate is respectful and that delegates feel safe to present their views.

The following principles are articulated and further defined with the purpose of ensuring respectful debate and ensuring that speakers are able to strongly and clearly present their arguments:

1. The principles of engagement for the Way Forward process, already published on the Way Forward website www.lca.org.au/wayforward/principles-engagement
2. The LCANZ principles for healthy dialogue, which were part of the materials provided to delegates during training for the 2021-23 Convention of General Synod
3. Additional principles from the Way Forward Synod Agenda and Outcomes Working Group about encouraging respectful debate
4. Additional elements for announcements that might be made at the start of each session.

Way Forward – Principles of Engagement

from www.lca.org.au/wayforward/principles-engagement

In one way or another, everyone in the LCANZ will be affected by the outcome of the General Synod 2024 vote on the proposal for the Way Forward in the ongoing debate on ordination. Therefore, everyone is invited and encouraged to participate in this important conversation. As members of the church engage in consultation and provide feedback, we ask everyone to abide by the same principles that we ask of General Synod delegates.

These principles include respect for everyone, regardless of the position they hold on ordination, gentleness in language and humility in attitude. The principles are based on the LCANZ Standards of Ethical Behaviour¹, which, in turn, are based on Colossians 3:12–14:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

These principles form the basis for how the project team, including the working groups, are engaging with each other and with the wider church. We ask everyone participating in this conversation to adopt these principles for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and the building up of his church. This includes how we frame our communications to the project team and others in the church, engage on social media, and speak about others in our church, family and social networks.

LCANZ Principles for Healthy Dialogue

The following principles were provided to delegates during their training in preparation for the 2023 face-to-face Synod and are a useful reminder of how and why we undertake debate and dialogue during Convention.

At the 2023 in-person sessions of the Convention of General Synod, there will be a range of important issues from proposals to discuss, some of them will be of a doctrinal nature. The voting outcomes from these debates will affect our church. It is important to remember that the church is bound by the decisions made by Synod. Therefore, how you vote on these issues is very important.

As you hear the dialogues and debates before and during the Convention of General Synod, you may see some emotion tied to certain issues. As a voter, you will need to listen to both sides of the debate, and then vote on what you believe would be in the best interest of the church moving forward, bearing in mind any advice or guidance your congregation has given to you.

The aim of the dialogues and discussions is to help reach the moment at which it is appropriate to take a vote.

To help delegates engage with this process, the LCANZ has identified five principles for healthy dialogue:

1. **Communion:** Because God has gathered us in communion with one another through his word and sacraments, we have freedom to dialogue with one another on contested matters. Strengthening this God-given communion is the goal of dialogue.
2. **Trust:** Because God has made us brothers and sisters in Christ, we can trust God to use our communion to build us up in love and use our differences to grow us in holiness of life.
3. **Listening:** Because God gives each of his children a unique perspective, we can listen to each other trusting God that as we listen, we will grow in understanding of ourselves, of the other person, and of the communion that God creates.
4. **Speaking:** Because God gives each of his children a unique perspective, we can speak to each other trusting God that as we speak, we will grow in understanding of ourselves, of the other person, and of the communion that God creates.
5. **Patience:** Because the communion God gives us in Christ is God's doing and not ours, we can be patient in listening and speaking to each other, trusting that God will deepen the unity he has already given us.

Together with these principles, delegates at the Convention of General Synod are asked to:

- come with an attitude of willing submission to the word of God
- come with an attitude of love for one another, patience, and genuinely attentive listening
- not expect their voice or view to suppress others or dominate them
- be willing to sit down so that others can speak what is on their mind
- pay attention to minority voices, the marginalised, the fearful, and the vulnerable, making room for them in the conversation
- be willing to adjust their thinking, particularly in terms of a desirable outcome, as the dialogue progresses
- be willing to commit time to the issues, however long that might take
- come prepared not necessarily to reach a final resolution, but to at least reach some agreement on what might happen next.

Respectful debate

The following specific actions during debate apply:

1. Acknowledge the chair when you commence speaking and introduce yourself, for example, 'Thank you, Bishop Paul. My name is XXXX, and I am a pastor/lay delegate from XXX in the XXX District', and 'Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I speak in favour of/against the motion ...'.
2. Avoid claims that others are acting against the will of God, are acting against the word of God, or just don't understand Scripture properly. Of course, you can argue and defend your own interpretation of Scripture and tradition. Assume that those with different opinions are equally committed to conscientiously following the will of God as they see it revealed in Scripture.
3. Focus as much as possible on the substance of the motion. The chair reserves the right to interrupt speakers where matters raised are disrespectful, speculative or not in alignment with the substance of the motion.
4. Respectful debate requires respectful listening as well as respectful speaking. Even if you have a good idea of how you intend to vote, listening carefully to those with a differing opinion can help you understand the reasons for that difference. Whether the motion passes or not, there will be a continuing need to understand the range of opinions on this and other theological, doctrinal and practice issues.
5. The debate can be progressed and understanding improved by answering questions posed by earlier speakers and by suggesting questions that later speakers might answer, so that the debate becomes more than a sequence of rehearsed speeches, and more of a conversation.

The chair and/or the Secretary of the Church should regularly remind delegates to refrain from acclaiming or reacting out loud to any of the speaker's comments.

6. Similarly to point 4 above, during discussions at tables, allow all participants to share their opinions. It can be helpful to focus on explaining why you believe in your position rather than trying to convince others that their opinions are in error.
7. A key role of the chair is to manage the meeting to ensure a psychologically safe environment. This includes providing comfort for how the meeting will be managed and setting expectations about what will happen when the line is crossed.
8. An advisor (or pastoral consultant) should watch proceedings from a pastoral point of view and advise the chair of inappropriate behaviour/dialogue to assist the chair in managing the temperature in the room. This advisor could be a member of a team consisting of a bishop or a member drawn from the General Synod Pastoral Care team but should not be a General Synod delegate. For instance, the advisor could be observing the behaviour and advise the chair: 'As a bishop observing the dialogue of God's people, I wish to advise you of XXX being in conflict with the principles of respectful debate'.

These reminders should be repeated at the start of sessions.

1. Debates will be televised, so your comments and actions should reflect well on the church's ability to debate hard questions in an atmosphere of mutual respect and communion.
2. Points of order:
 - are only used if the debate does not follow the rules of debate in the by-laws
 - should not be used to question whether content is relevant or repetitive; that is handled directly by the chair
 - cannot be used to clarify statements by the chair or by speakers
 - cannot be used to propose amendments or foreshadow future motions; (the chair will explain the process if delegates require clarification or have a question)
 - must not be used to delay the proceedings
 - may be overruled by the chair.
3. When you are requested to speak, please acknowledge the chair, introduce yourself, and acknowledge your fellow delegates.
4. It is unacceptable to communicate with others outside the auditorium. If you need to send or receive a message, please do so outside the auditorium.
5. Delegates who persistently display unacceptable debating behaviour may be asked by the chair to remove themselves from the auditorium.

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