

AGENDA 4.8

Church Worker Support Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND KEY RESULTS AGAINST PLAN

Most objectives of the Church Worker Support (CWS) Department were met with the exception of interrupted activities due to COVID-19. This includes Policy development, congregational visitation program, Professional Pastoral Supervision Program implemented, good communication and relationships with calling and employing bodies and other church entities. The CWS team improved their ability to provide up to date and accurate advice and support to church entities around employment and service-related matters, in particular employment and industrial award interpretation and concerns. Congregational visiting program commenced and was increasingly well received (2020 notwithstanding).

SUCSESSES

- Implemented access to Employee Assistance Program for all LCA and LCNZ pastors, lay workers and other employees paid though the LCA HRS.
- Church Worker Wellbeing Surveys conducted in 2020. An expanded research project with ALC will provide regular, valuable evidence and potentially lead to improved knowledge and practices across the church.
- The development of the LCA Learning Hub provides important and up to date information and resources to support congregational leaders and church workers.
- Implementation of Professional Pastoral Supervision Program was an achievement and there is a growing uptake of this practice. Early anecdotal reports from participants are overwhelmingly positive.

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

- COVID-19 was a massive challenge for the whole church. The implications of the pandemic will continue to be felt through the communities in which we serve for some time yet and church workers are not immune to any of the local and wider challenges. It is vitally important that the wellbeing of church workers, congregational leaders and the church as a whole is considered and attended to.
- The anxiety around the future of the church can (and sadly does) lead to problematic behaviour from time to time.
- The volume and scope of employment and workplace health and safety legislation changes which impact congregations and parishes presents massive challenges to a largely volunteer management body.

MAJOR IDENTIFIED RISKS

- Given the financial constraints faced by congregations, parishes, and other church entities it has not been appropriate to implement anticipated fee for service arrangements. Other funding mechanisms have been used to support the department's work, but ongoing sustainability is an issue still to be resolved.
- Changing conditions and expectations around employment (through legislation and other regulation) and service of clergy will continue to provide a complex and volatile space for time to come. In Victoria and Queensland, it is now a criminal offence to underpay an individual based on award rates and conditions with it being considered wage theft.

- Workplace Health and Safety will be a similarly complex and challenging space and the same applies in this area for congregational and parish leaders. Workplace Health and Safety encompasses more than just physical safety with an increasing emphasis from regulators on psychologically safe workplaces and spaces, including when working from home.

MEMBERS

Advisory Committee for Church Worker Support

Nicky Lennon, Peter Schirmer (Chair), Kerryyn Simpfendorfer, Luke Spilsbury, Tim Stringer, Chris Materne (Consultant)

BACKGROUND

The Church Worker Support Department was established in 2016 to consolidate a range of initiatives that existed across the church to support those in service to the church. The department's aim to see all church workers equipped, supported, and encouraged to fulfill their mission and ministry. There is no doubt that vocational service, employment and workplace health & safety matters and legislation are volatile, often complex and challenging spaces. The work of the department focusses largely on ensuring that accurate and reliable support is available for and to church workers and (largely volunteer) congregation and church leadership. The department has a growing focus on the wellbeing of all church workers. The following tables summarise church worker service across the church as at April 2021.

Pastors

- Active Pastors – 282 (includes 33 Specific ministry and indigenous pastors)
- Emeriti Pastors – 227 (approximately 75 currently provide regular locum services)
- Pastors on Leave of Absence – 16; Pastors without a call – 2

Age Bracket	Number
70+	10
60-69	86
50-59	87
40-49	53
30-39	32
20-29	3
Unknown	11

Lay Workers (203) and Employees (258)

Ministry Area	Paid Lay Workers		Volunteer LW		Other Employees	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Administration	29	6			98	19
Comms/Archives/Library/Education	16	5			10	4
Pastoral Care/Chaplain	29	8	3	4	3	2
Child, Youth & Family ministry	33	8			6	1
Worship/Church Planter	4	8	1		3	1
Church Support	7	3			6	6
Café/Camp	3	8			35	25
Mission/Mission Support	15	6			8	10
Cleaning/Maintenance					13	8
	139	56	4	4	182	76

ACHIEVEMENTS/RESULTS AGAINST PLAN

MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Desired Outcomes (2018-2020)</i>	<i>Activities & Indicators to the end of 2020</i>
<p>1. LCA HRS fully implemented. 95% of Employing/calling bodies using payroll functions and progressively using other HRS modules</p>	<p>Employing/calling bodies use the LCA HRS to administer their payroll. Employing/calling bodies use other modules of the HRS as they become operational. Working titles of modules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance management • Training & development • Talent management, including calls. • WHS <p>HRS team supported to maximise use of HRS by employing/calling bodies and individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRS Implementation Projects, including pastors call process, constrained by resource allocation. • Church Worker Support Staff support LCA entities to meet LCA HRS requirements, and support LCA HRS staff when appropriate. • Completed reconciliation and update of Pastors Sick Leave balances in HRS in consultation with HRS team and impacted pastors • Congregations are informed about and encouraged to use the LCA HRS to gain maximum benefit from the system. • Recording of training and development activities in the LCA HRS is not possible to the extent previously though possible. Additional modules which might accommodate improved capabilities are not financially viable at this point in time.
<p>2. Clear and consistent policies and guidelines (P&G) in place to guide Church Worker Service practices in the LCA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New P&Gs written and approved on an ongoing basis. Appropriate consultation is taking place. • P&G documents stored electronically and accessible to Employing Bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following policies have been approved by GCB: Church Worker Service (overarching parent document,) Pastor Call Process, Employee Recruitment & Selection, Volunteer Identification & Selection, Church Worker Service Commencement, Provision of Housing for Pastors, Vocational Development & Training. • Guidelines are relevant and accessible to employing/calling bodies and are updated as required and are available via the LCA Portal.

<p>3. Local Level support to Congregations / Employing/calling bodies and Church Workers is provided</p>	<p>Church Worker support department staff visit every congregation/calling or employing body with Church Workers at least once by end 2020 and then regularly every 3 years. CWS Officers respond to Congregations, employing/calling bodies, church workers in a timely fashion and provide appropriate support. Congregations and calling/employing bodies and church workers are confident in support and advice provided by Church Worker Support Department.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to refine the suite of template documents that can be adapted for use by employing bodies (eg Position/Role Description, Induction Checklists, and Employment Agreements etc.) all available on LCA Portal • LCA Learning Hub developed and now resides on ALC iLearn platform – launched April 2021. • Attended District Synods and other events in 2018 and 2019 to promote Church Worker Support initiatives and resources. No travel permitted in most of 2020 • Visited 266 congregations/parishes and other employing/calling bodies until February 2020. • Produced 17 CWS e-news and additional HRS e-news to support appropriate communication channels with congregations, employing/calling bodies, and church workers. • On average team interacts with 70 employing/calling bodies and/or church workers per week to provide support and advice related to church worker service management, employment and related practices. • Continue to administer voluntary Lay Worker Long Service Leave fund on behalf of participating employing bodies.
<p>4. Encourage and nurture a culture of learning and continuous improvement and distribute relevant information.</p>	<p>All church workers and their Congregation or employing/calling bodies are aware of vocational development opportunities. All church workers participate in appropriate vocational and professional development. A centralised register (Learning Hub) is developed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with ALC to support their programs, assist with development and promote regularly. • Supported Continuing Education for Pastors (CEP) Coordinator and ALC with CEP program and development of broader Vocational Development Program. 67, 53, & 68 pastors submitted CEP logs for activities in 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively. • Identify and promote learning and other development activities • Attended school careers events in partnership with other LCA

		<p>entities (eg ALC, LCC & LDS) when possible (limited due to COVID-19).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with ALC research staff to identify opportunities for ongoing research and support research students. • LCA Learning Hub developed and launched.
5. Establish and encourage local networks to assist church workers to support one another	<p>Church workers and their Congregations or employing/calling bodies to have access to local networks so that they can support each other and maximise the effective use of resources.</p> <p>Employee Assistance Program for all LCA paid church workers (ie pastors, lay workers and employees) in place and utilised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote development of local level or district wide initiatives • Attend District events when invited. • EAP provider sourced, and program implemented. information disseminated and eligible church workers (all pastors, all lay workers and employees paid through HRS) informed.
6. Support employing/calling bodies to manage compliance, industrial relations and human resource management issues and matters	<p>Employing/calling bodies receive accurate, appropriate advice from CWS team members.</p> <p>Employing/calling bodies receive notification about significant decisions made by regulatory bodies (such as Work Safe, Fair Work, ATO etc)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWS team are knowledgeable and confident to respond to general and exceptional queries (requires regular research and development activities). • Frequent legislation changes made have been communicated and issues are being worked through with impacted entities.
7. Continue aspects of work previously undertaken by Board of Support for Pastoral Ministry on behalf of CoB	<p>Matters referred to CWSD by CoB are dealt with appropriately</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain effective relationship with CoB as a group and as individual members, to work collegially. • Provide operational support and advice as requested. • Work with CoB (e.g., annual reviews, call process) reported by LCA Secretary of the Church in SoC and CoB reports.
8. Respond to Matters arising from the Child Protection Project	<p>Matters referred to CWSD by CoB and or PSD are dealt with accordingly.</p> <p>50% of eligible Church Workers participating in Professional Pastoral Supervision (PPS) Program by end on 2020.</p> <p>Candidates for ordained ministry service undertake psychological assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWS Manager is a member of the LCA Child Protection Project team. • Professional Pastoral Supervision Program established. 36 pastors and 1 lay worker actively undertaking PPS as at December 2020. • Small working group under direction of LCA Bishop has developed pilot protocol for psychological assessment for

	prior to acceptance into ministry.	pastoral ministry candidates. To be trialled in 2021.
9. Complete 50.500 project – Video series <i>What Lutherans Believe</i>	Video Series to be completed and distributed by end 2020 along with accompanying/support documents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Videos published on LCA website • 3 Videos in post-production • 2 final videos to be completed by September 2021 • Production constrained by resource availability and then COVID interrupting filming and production.

PROGRESS AGAINST PLAN/OBJECTIVES

COVID-19 disrupted the scheduled program to visit congregations in 2020. However, CWS team were able to work from home (and later back in offices) and embarked on program of checking in with lay workers, some employees and congregational leadership with assurances that others were maintaining regular contact with pastors. The team responded to multiple queries related to JobKeeper and around working conditions of employees and pastors, offering support to congregational leadership as required.

A longer-term project with ALC for 2020-21 was fast -tracked to investigate church worker wellbeing at two time points in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions in early April and late May 2020. Summaries of results were published in *The Lutheran* and the *Lutheran Theological Journal* with a full report provided to the General Church Board and the College of Bishops. Ethics approval to conduct an annual survey (for 10 years commencing in 2021) was granted and first survey distributed in March 2021.

Time spent not travelling was used working on other projects and reducing accrued leave balances. This included development work on the LCA Learning Hub which was launched in May 2021. The LCA Learning Hub is hosted by ALC on the iLearn platform and is accessible to everyone with a valid LCA login (LCA email address) and password.

Production of the *What Lutherans Believe* video series has been challenging due to illness in the team, difficulty in script development and then COVID-19. It is anticipated that the series will be completed by the time the General Convention of Synod meets.

SUCCESSSES

The introduction of Employee Assistance Program across LCA and LCNZ to cover all pastors, lay workers, and employees paid via the LCA HR System is a major achievement. Along with access to a wide range of resources pastors, lay workers, and eligible employees (and their direct family members) can access up to three counselling sessions per year. The CWS department is providing the funds for this service to enable it to be at no cost to eligible church workers or their calling/employing bodies. Sixteen sessions were attended in 2019 and twelve in 2020. The usage rate trend suggests utilisation of the service will increase for 2021.

The team worked with other LCA departments to develop resources for Church@Home in response to COVID gathering restrictions.

Church Worker Wellbeing Surveys were conducted in 2020. This has led to an expanded research project with ALC which will provide valuable evidence and potentially lead to improved knowledge and practices.

The inability to travel freed time to be able to develop a model for a Learning and resource hub. The first modules of the LCA Learning Hub were launched in April 2021. This time in the office

(or working from home as required by COVID management restrictions) also enabled the team to make phone or video contact with all lay workers, many pastors and other church workers and leadership to offer support, encouragement and advice. This was well received at the time.

Implementation of Professional Pastoral Supervision Program was an achievement and working with the College of Bishops' appointed Coordinator (Rev Gordon Wegener) has seen a growing uptake of this practice. Early anecdotal reports from participants are overwhelmingly positive.

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

COVID-19 was a massive challenge for the whole church. The implications of the pandemic will continue to be felt through the communities in which we serve for some time yet and church workers are not immune to any of the local and wider challenges. Many church workers carry trauma (their own and that of congregation members) from when they could not gather to worship corporately and from the effects of variable workloads throughout the pandemic. It is vitally important that the wellbeing of church workers, congregational leaders and the church as a whole is considered and attended to.

Relationships between entities of the church require careful and ongoing development. The anxiety around the future of the church can (and sadly does) lead to problematic behaviour from time to time.

The volume and scope of employment and workplace health and safety legislation changes which impact congregations and parishes presents massive challenges to a largely volunteer management body. Whilst support is available the responsibility of adhering to legislation and other regulatory authorities inevitably reset with the legal employer. This responsibility resting on volunteer leadership is an increasingly heavy burden. This may lead to challenges in securing volunteers to fill leadership positions across the church.

RISKS

Major risks

1. When the CWS department was formed there was in intention to develop a fee for service model to support the ongoing sustainability of the work of the department. Given the financial constraints faced by congregations, parishes, and other church entities it has not been appropriate to implement this. Other funding mechanisms have been used to support the department's work, but ongoing sustainability is an issue still to be resolved.
2. Changing conditions and expectations around employment (through legislation and other regulation) and service of clergy will continue to provide a complex and volatile space for time to come. In Victoria and Queensland, it is now a criminal offence to underpay an individual based on award rates and conditions with it being considered wage theft. Congregation and parish leaders must be aware of their responsibilities under employment law.
3. Workplace Health and Safety will be a similarly **complex and challenging** space and the same applies in this area for congregational and parish leaders. Workplace Health and Safety encompasses more than just physically safety with an increasing emphasis from regulators on psychologically safe workplaces and spaces, including when working from home.

Likelihood of identified risks occurring and potential impact

1. Funding of ongoing work will continue to be an ongoing challenge.
2. Where employment arrangements are not well managed or enacted appropriately there are large risks to employing bodies in terms of financial exposure, wellbeing of all impacted parties, and reputational damage to the church. Criminal charges may result in some instances.
3. Breaches of Workplace Health and Safety requirements and workplace accidents have the potential to have tragic consequences for injured workers, their families, and the church. Criminal charges may result in some instances.

Summary of action taken to mitigate risk

1. Working with LCA departments to reduce costs without reducing service to congregations, parishes and other LCA entities.
2. Where relevant awards exist, these should be used to establish wages and conditions for employees. This will reduce the risk of underpayment of wages and with the LCA HRS in place should not impose excessive additional burden on employing bodies. This is a work in progress to be attended to in mid-2021. Casual employment needs to be carefully monitored and handled in accordance with new legislation. The LCA Learning Hub has a comprehensive suite of resources to assist employers in this regard. The CWS Team work proactively to keep abreast of legislation and changing expectations. Calling and employing bodies can seek advice directly and the LCA Learning Hub also has a comprehensive suite of resources to assist in this regard.
3. Employers must be aware of their responsibilities under Workplace Health and Safety legislation and regulations. The LCA Learning Hub has a comprehensive suite of resources to assist employers in this regard.

ALIGNMENT TO 'OUR DIRECTION 2018-2024'

The Church Worker Support Department aims to support the achievement of the following LCA Strategic Priorities and Objectives:

1. Grow as God's People

1.3 Equip people for mission and ministry in the church, local communities and the wider world

2. Go as God's People

2.2 Encourage strong missional-oriented leadership by supporting pastors, lay workers and other leaders to be effective ministers of Christ in a changing world

2.6 Support existing communities to be active in mission

3. Enable us to Grow and Go

3.1 Governance

3.1.1 Strengthen governance at all levels, clarify accountabilities and ensure appropriate support

3.2 Engagement and Communications

3.2.1 Support greater engagement with local communities to assist churchwide services to be responsive to their needs

3.2.3 Encourage local communities so that they feel valued, united and hopeful within their wider church family

3.2.4 Deepen collaboration between the ministries of the church to achieve integrated and effective communications and engagement across the church

3.3 Assets and Resources

3.3.1 Enhance care of our people, especially church workers and their families

3.3.3 Enhance stewardship of our assets and resources

3.3.4 Encourage greater support for the work of the church using innovative approaches.

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Australian Lutheran College	<p>Work with ALC staff to ensure appropriate programs are developed.</p> <p>Actively promote educational programs to Church Workers and their calling or employing bodies.</p> <p>Working with ALC to promote Career, Service and Study opportunities for school leavers in Lutheran Schools.</p> <p>Support CEP Coordinator.</p> <p>Support Research Activities and Program of ALC.</p> <p>CWS Manager is member of ALC Student Fund Committee.</p> <p>Worked with ALC to develop LCA Learning Hub.</p>
College of Bishops	<p>Provide assistance and advice as requested.</p> <p>Provide support for pastoral supervision program.</p> <p>Support CEP Coordinator.</p>
General Church Board	<p>Provide assistance and advice as requested.</p> <p>Make recommendations to GCB as required (e.g., stipends/salaries determinations)</p> <p>Work with GCB as Policy is developed.</p>
Office of the Bishop: Includes International Mission, Secretary's Office, Reconciliation Ministry, Professional Standards Department, Communications, Archives, Finance and Admin, IT, Local Mission - Including Grow Ministries, Local Mission department, Lutheran Media, New & Renewing Churches	<p>Work collaboratively with all departments.</p> <p>Provide assistance and advice as requested.</p> <p>Seek ways to improve cross department interactions to improve effectiveness.</p> <p>CWS Manager member of LCA Scholarship committee, Servant of Christ selection committee and Child Protection Project team.</p>
LCA Churchwide Office Departments and other LCA entities: Includes LEA, ALWS, LLL, Finke River Mission	<p>Work collaboratively</p> <p>Provide assistance and advice as requested</p>
LCA Districts	<p>Work collaboratively</p> <p>Provide assistance and advice as requested</p>

FINANCE/BUDGET