

# Life News

*Promoting the sanctity of life*

## End of life matters : The Funeral

In this article I'll briefly respond to a number of questions about funerals. I'll give my opinion as a relatively experienced pastor of the LCA (ordained in 1997), and I'll also quote from the commentary on the funeral rite from the Church Rites of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

### ***Why have a Christian funeral? What is the purpose of a Christian funeral?***

In the commentary to the funeral rite, three reasons are given for having a Christian funeral:

1. The funeral is very much for mourners. It comforts them in their grief with God's own word, and sustains them in their separation from their loved one and their various feelings of sorrow, depression, anger, guilt, bewilderment and numbness. It helps them remember their loved one with thankfulness for his/her life. The rite progresses from depths of anguish to heights of hope and assurance, helping mourners to resume life without the loved one.
2. The funeral rite is also for those who come to pay their last respects and give support to grieving friends. The rite prepares them for their own dying.
3. The funeral is also for the church. The rite is anchored to the crucified and risen Lord, and proclaims him and his work of redemption. It publicises the faith and message of the church.

So, while on the one hand it could not be said that Christian funerals are mandated by the Lord, Christian people in different times and places have found that it is natural in the life of faith (for the reasons just given) to conduct funerals.

### ***Why does there appear to be a trend away from having funerals in a church and having them at a funeral home instead?***

I'm assuming this question is about an apparent trend of *Christian* funerals moving from the church building to a funeral parlour. It seems likely to me that there is such a trend, and I imagine that this is largely due to practical reasons: it is

### *Inside this issue*

The Funeral.....	1
National Conference Report.....	3
Farewell to our Chair... ..	6
ALC Pastoral Graduates Dinner .....	7
Snippets .....	8

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*Life News* is the  
newsletter of  
Lutherans for Life  
Est. in 1987

Sponsored by the  
Lutheran Church of  
Australia.

Print Post Approved  
Periodical No,  
PP442570/0006  
ISSN 1033-7725

EDITOR: Trudi Skene

often easier (in terms of parking and catering) and less expensive to hold the whole funeral at one location.

As it happens, the funeral rite of the church does not assume that the funeral will be held in a church building. In terms of location, the rite assumes the funeral will be held at 'the church or funeral parlour'. Wherever the funeral is held, the mourners are referred to as 'the congregation', with the evident understanding that at the funeral the church is present and gathered in the name of the Triune God. In the rite there are readings from Holy Scripture, prayers, confession of faith, and commendations and blessings in the name of the Triune God. If a funeral is held outside the church, there is also the recommendation that the congregation's paschal candle be placed at the head of the coffin.

***There appears to be a trend of having no funeral (just a private burial or cremation), but having a memorial service later? Does it matter that the body is not present?***

Certainly during the time of covid (and due to state regulations) it has been more common to have a memorial service offered after a relatively private burial or cremation. Although there is in my opinion nothing wrong with this practice, it seems to me preferable to have the body (or even the ashes) present at a funeral service where possible. This is because, as is evident from Scripture and tradition, the church has always shown respect for the human body from conception to natural death, and has honoured the human body even in death (think, for example, how the bodies of John the Baptist and Jesus were treated in death).

***Cremation vs burial – is there a biblical reason for choosing one or the other?***

This is a good follow up question, and deals with some of the same issues as the last question. In the commentary to the funeral rite we read these words:

*The Christian respects the human body. God cre-*

*ated and redeemed it, and his Spirit sanctifies bodies of believers to be his temple. Furthermore, God in Christ took on a human body himself, and in dying and rising again overcame the power of death, so that our bodies can be resurrected from death. In the past Christians have usually preferred to return the body to the earth; in cremation the body is returned to the elements.*

It is here evident that the Lutheran Church of Australia sees either burial or cremation as acceptable ways to deal respectfully with the human body after death. In the wider tradition of the church there has been a clear preference for burial over cremation. This preference comes from the biblical teaching on the body as the good creation of God, and the Scriptural witness of the hope that we have in Christ of the resurrection of the body. Based on this biblical testimony, burial has been seen to most suitably express Christian belief regarding the place of the body in the order of creation and the resurrection.

When and where cremation has seen to be tied up with pagan beliefs, including a denial of the resurrection of the body, then the church has actively forbidden cremation. In today's context such an understanding does not appear to hold. My own church, Bethlehem in the centre of Adelaide, does not have room for a graveyard, but there is a memorial garden for the ashes of members of the congregation adjacent to the church.

***How do you make sure your wishes for your funeral are followed if your surviving family are not Christian?***

The first step is to have your wishes for your funeral settled in your own mind, and then committed to writing with copies given to your family members and the pastor of your congregation. It is good to make these preparations while you are still in relatively good health, and able to communicate clearly.

As part of this process you will want to make it clear that you would like a service conducted by a Lutheran pastor according to the rites of the Lutheran Church of Australia. You will also want to make it clear whether you have any preference for the service to be held at a church or funeral parlour, and whether you would prefer your body to be buried or cremated.

You might also want to consider what hymns or songs you would suggest for your funeral, as well as what bible readings or funeral text you would suggest. It might also be helpful to write down information that could be used when putting together an obituary.

It's not uncommon for people to have made such preparations years before their deaths, and for their instructions to be kept on file at the church office or pastors' study, as well as with family members.

*Fraser Pearce is Senior Pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide. He is Vice Chair of the Commission on Theology and Inter Church Relations, and was a member of the Department of Liturgics.*

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## Fearfully and wonderfully made – Celebrating the beginnings of human life.

Lutherans for Life National Conference, 18 September 2021

Psalm 139:13,14 was the theme of the recent National Conference organised by Lutherans for Life (LfL) at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Aberfoyle Park, SA. Over 40 people were privileged to be able to attend the conference in person and over 20 people watched the livestream on YouTube from around Australia.

Pastor Josh Pfeiffer (Chairperson of LfL) opened the conference with a devotion based on Luke 1:39-45 – the account of Mary visiting the pregnant Elizabeth and the unborn John leaping for joy at the news of our Saviour's impending birth. Pregnancy does not always engender feelings of joy. We may experience feelings of fear, of being overwhelmed and uncertain about the future, particularly if the pregnancy wasn't planned. And unfortunately, pregnancy doesn't always have the outcome for which we had hoped. But this text reminds us that life is a gift that should be celebrated. And Jesus' life is the most precious of all gifts because his life gives us life – eternal and abun-

### Lutherans for Life Branches

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*Serving the Riverland area of South Australia*

Contact: Mrs Lois Rathjen  
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#### New Zealand: Est. June 1991

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04 476 9398

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Contact: Mr Norm Auricht  
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dant. Kathie Renner sang *Right from the beginning* by Erin Bode to finish our time of devotion and segue beautifully to our first speaker.

Our first guest speaker was Pastor Tim Klein (Faith Lutheran Church, Warradale) who looked at the Biblical reasons why life should be celebrated. He posed the question “What is the worth of life”? Using numerous texts from scripture, Pastor Tim demonstrated how each of us was planned in the mind of God right from “the beginning”. God deliberately and intentionally formed us from dust (unlike the rest of his creation) and breathed his own breath into us. He made us in his image to partake in his immortality. We are all unique with a specific job or purpose to fulfil. Our worth is found in God, not ourselves – we need look no further than the cross and Jesus’ sacrifice to see how much we are loved and valued by God.

Jodie Pickard (founder of *Love Adelaide*) presented the biological side of the beginnings of life. Jodie bemoaned the fact that whilst the biology of fertilization and conception may be taught in schools, the ‘miracle of life’ is not. Two videos explaining the intricate, scientific detail of fertilization and the development of the unborn child in the womb were presented and reinforced just how miraculous the whole process is! Pro-choice groups often accuse the pro-life movement of using emotive language about pregnancy, but pro-choice groups use unscientific lies to dehumanise the unborn so that abortion is “acceptable”.

Abortion is the leading cause of death in Australia, and it is estimated that 1 in 4 women will have an abortion. With recent changes to abortion legislation in numerous states, it is tempting for pro-life groups to give up hope, but Jodie is calling on churches to unite and to continue the fight against the devaluing of life. Apathy

towards abortion is what the pro-choice movement relies on to progress their agenda. One way of publicly showing our opposition to abortion is by joining in with the “marches for life” that take place in most capital cities annually. See our Facebook page for notices about these events.

The morning’s programme concluded with another musical item from Kathie Renner – *Little things with great love* by The Porter’s Gate.

Meagan Schwarz and Pastor Andrew Brook (St John’s Lutheran Church, Unley) shared personal perspectives on when things go wrong with the beginnings of life. Meagan suffered a miscarriage of her second child at 10 weeks gestation. She discussed the poignant physical, emotional, and spiritual struggles that followed – the guilt, the questions, and the pain of other women’s pregnancies and children when her arms were empty. She feared forgetting her “Little One”. Meagan also shared what she has found helpful in her healing process, including collaborating with Pastor Andrew Brook to hold a service of remembrance in 2019 on International Pregnancy and Infant Loss Day (October 15).



*Kathie Renner at the keyboard*

Pastor Andrew Brook's daughter was born gravely ill with a congenital heart defect. Separated from interstate family, Pastor Andrew and wife Jodi learnt what it is like to feel powerless and how to lean on the power of prayer. Colleague Pastors visited them and their daughter (Emilia) in the hospital, anointed Emilia with oil and prayed over the family. These Christian rituals brought them comfort and strength at a difficult time and this experience became a great lesson in how to help others going through similar experiences.

The service of remembrance held in 2019 at St John's Lutheran Church, Unley, was based on resources produced by the LCA in "Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care" – an invaluable part of any Pastor's toolkit. It provided the opportunity for anyone who had experienced miscarriage or stillbirth to have that loss acknowledged - even if it had occurred decades previously - and to hear words of comfort and healing. The service was greatly appreciated by all those who attended. Pastor Andrew also said that even having something as simple as a prayer petition in the Prayer of the Church on All Saints Day to remember all the babies lost to miscarriage, stillbirth and abortion is a powerful way to acknowledge loss. You can download some of these resources (including the actual service order used by Pastor Andrew in 2019) from our website (see link below).

Our final guest speaker was Kimberley Pfeiffer who spoke about some of the ethical issues surrounding the beginnings of life:

- How do we treat embryos that have been created using reproductive technology?
- Should they be used in research?
- How do we measure their worth?
- What do we do with "excess" embryos?
- How do we deal with the information that comes



from pre-natal screening for genetic abnormalities?

Our postmodern society likes to deconstruct everything in order to understand it. Unfortunately, this deconstructionism leads to the breakdown of relationships - the relationship between mother and child, husband and wife, pregnancy and healthcare, sex and love, procreation and marriage. Christians can bring a lot to ethical discussions because we believe these relationships should not and cannot be separated or deconstructed. Our ideas of good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral are based on our faith. And Christians also bring something unique to ethics – forgiveness. Forgiveness has been described as a form of love that goes beyond good and evil, a love where there is no judgement and no condemnation. Kimberley encouraged us to share our stories and perspectives, to live out what we believe, to thank God for his gift of life and ask how we can serve in a way that serves/celebrates life.

The final session of the day was a panel discussion of questions raised by conference attendees throughout the day. There were far too many questions to get through, but it was great to hear some different perspectives from the various guest speakers on the same topics. I think all those who attended in person and





*All the guest speakers taking part in the panel discussion*

online would have come away from the conference feeling very encouraged and hopefully inspired to look for ways to celebrate life in their own homes and congregations.

*Trudi Skene*

*Editor, Life News*

*Photos courtesy of Rose Vonow*

#### Helpful links:

Resources for miscarriage and stillbirth

<http://www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au/public-resources/worship-pastoral-care/>

Fertilization/conception video from Nucleus Medical Media (sample only)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFrVmDgh4v4>

Fetal development month by month video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtDknjng8TA>

#### Miss the conference? Catch up on YouTube.

Pr Tim Klein, Biblical <https://youtu.be/mgESmDHLnm8>

Jodi Pickard - Biological, political <https://youtu.be/vo39zAr7dL0>

Meagan Schwarz & Pr Andrew Brook, Personal/pastoral <https://youtu.be/RfTLWBqc5L4>

Panel Discussion <https://youtu.be/0KRwT8Y551o>

## Farewell and thanks

Late last year, Pastor Joshua and Kimberley Pfeiffer, along with their children Evangeline, Samuel, Anastasia and Levi, embarked on a much-anticipated journey to Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St Louis, where Pastor Joshua has commenced post-graduate theological studies.

Understandably, the family's relocation means that Pastor Joshua will be standing down from his formal involvement with Lutherans for Life (LFL), including his role as Chair. This realisation brings some sadness, but also much thanksgiving for the 12 years of faithful service Pastor Joshua gave to this group. What a wonderful gift he has been!

Pastor Joshua joined the LFL committee back in 2009, and took up the role of Chair in 2012. Since then he has very ably, and always with a servant-heart, led LFL's committee of volunteers in promoting the sanctity of human life within the LCA, and the wider com-



*Meg Pearce farewells Pastor Josh on behalf of Lfl*

munity. Projects that Pastor Josh oversaw during this time included the development of the LFL website and associated resources; purchase and presentation of LFL's foetal model; teaching on a wide range of life issues; organising and running national LFL conferences and dinners for pastors graduating from Australian Lutheran College. The list could go on..

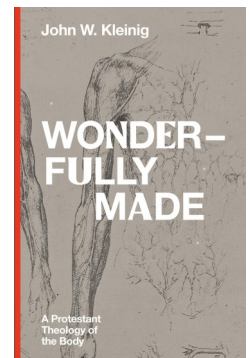
Pastor Joshua, we thank and honour you for your many years of dedicated service to LFL. We wish you and your family God's richest blessings on your time in the United States of America. Jesus says: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40

*Chelsea Pietsch*  
*Secretary, LfL*

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## LfL Annual Dinner for ALC Pastoral Graduates

On October 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Lutherans for Life Committee were fortunate to be able to host their annual dinner for ALC Pastoral graduates. It was a time to celebrate, both achievements in study and the gift of life that God has given us, as well as to introduce the candidates and their wives to the work of LFL.



Dr John Kleinig was the guest speaker and shared about his new book, '*Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body*'. He spoke about his spiritual journey of writing *Wonderfully Made* and how he was so passionate to share what God had taught him over his life about the gift of the human body. In a world filled with so many different views on the body, Dr John was inspired to write a book that gave a *positive* Biblical vision - not to invite condemnation but understanding.

This is a book that truly speaks to how God has designed us, and His purpose for our bodies. Modern issues such as gender, the unborn, chastity and euthanasia are explored, not in a moralistic way, but simply to proclaim God's truth and how and why we have been *Wonderfully Made*.



*The new Pastors and their wives, (from L-R: Mitch and Olivia Kitson, Ben and Brianna Graham, and Kayla and David Cherry.*

This spoke to the heart of what we do at Lutherans for Life, in promoting the sanctity of God's gift of human life. God has taught us to love our neighbour, even the neighbours that society looks down on. It is God's love that drives us to proclaim that every life matters and to advocate for the lives that the world has forgotten.

To the three graduating pastoral students (now all since ordained), it is our prayer that God would continue to work in you and give you courage to boldly share God's vision for our lives and bodies.

♪ *To God be the Glory, great things He has done!* ♪  
*Rose Vonow LfL member*

## Snippets

### Abortion leading cause of death

"More human beings died in abortions than any other cause in 2021. Statistics compiled by Worldometers indicates that there were over 42.6 million abortions worldwide in 2021. Abortion deaths far outnumbered other causes such as disease, cancer, smoking, malaria, and HIV/AIDS."

[www.lifenews.com/2022/01/03/abortion-was-the-leading-cause-of-death-worldwide-in-2021-killing-42-6-million-people/](http://www.lifenews.com/2022/01/03/abortion-was-the-leading-cause-of-death-worldwide-in-2021-killing-42-6-million-people/)

### Euthanasia isn't needed

Oncologist Dr Marion Harris writes of three patients with cancer who met the Victorian criteria for voluntary assisted dying and yet with good care have continued to enjoy life. "Politicians are told by activist right-to-die groups that Australians support VAD. But, as we have been reminded during the pandemic, our autonomy must be curtailed when its exercise creates a real risk of harm to others. Le-

galising euthanasia and physician- assisted suicide creates such a real risk of harm, especially for those who may feel pushed towards requesting it by isolation, loneliness, lack of resources, being a burden on family or fear of future decline in function or pain."

[www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/better-palliative-care-is-needed-not-euthanasia/news-story/573cdd1f56eada23f0ae5f7138d1bd30](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/better-palliative-care-is-needed-not-euthanasia/news-story/573cdd1f56eada23f0ae5f7138d1bd30)

### Privacy more important than accurate abortion data?

South Australians may recall the passage of the Termination of Pregnancy Act last year to decriminalise abortion. Now the Law Society and some MPs argue that the draft regulations risk breaching women's privacy. Wellbeing SA reports that such information is already gathered on a strictly confidential basis for a range of conditions, including cancer and perinatal services. <https://indaily.com.au/news/2022/01/21/privacy-warning-over-sa-govt-demand-for-abortion-data/>

*Dr Rob Pollnitz*

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The latest issue of *Life News* and past issues can also be found on our website

[www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au/public-resources/life-news/](http://www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au/public-resources/life-news/)

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