

Why affirm the teaching of the church to call and ordain men only to the office of the public ministry?

Discussion about the possible call and ordination of women to the pastoral ministry has been going on in the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) for more than twenty years. The LCA's teaching on the issue has been in place since the union of the two previous synods. At the time of union the new church declared that '1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments' and claimed that 'this apostolic rule ...is binding on all Christendom.'

In what follows you will find some biblical and theological arguments that underpin that teaching to help explain why the LCA should continue to be faithful to that teaching. For more extensive study, look at the two reports that have been before the church, especially in this case, the arguments that support the current teaching of the church ([CTICR Final Report 2000](#), and the [CTICR Summary 2006](#)).

The weight of argument

The exegetical and theological work that has been done with respect to the two key texts taken in their context, demonstrate that the prohibition of ordaining women rests on a number of foundations. They include the application of the command to a wider Christian community than the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor 14:33b), the actual prohibition of women speaking in the liturgical assembly (1 Cor 14:34a), the teaching of God's Law on subordination (1 Cor 14:34b), the command of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37), and the warning about rejecting this teaching (1 Cor 14:38). They also include a conclusion, which appeals in part to God's created order, that women are not to assume an authoritative teaching role in the liturgical assembly (1 Tim 2:11-13).

There has been much discussion about what is meant by the prohibition against speaking in 1 Corinthians 14: 34a. From elsewhere we know that women may speak in tongues (1 Cor 14:5,23), prophesy in worship (1 Cor 11:5; 14:5,23,31) and take part in liturgical prayer (1 Cor 11:5). The 'speaking' then is not about prayer or singing or even simply disorderly chatter. Elsewhere the same word to speak (Greek, *lalein*) is used as a synonym for authoritative teaching (see for example, Matt 28:18; John 18:19-20; Acts 4:1; 1 Cor 2:6-7; 2 Cor 2:17; Heb 13:7). The reference to the word of God in 14:36 shows that this has to do with the proclamation of the apostolic message. In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul says that women are not permitted to speak in the liturgical assembly but must be subordinate, together with the other men, to those who have been appointed to fulfil that role.

Another key issue has been to determine what the command of the Lord refers to in 1 Corinthians 14:37. The immediate context is the question of women taking a leading speaking role in church, a preaching/teaching ministry (Eph 4:11). In response to potential opposition or doubt, the apostle Paul teaches that:

- the Corinthians are part of a wider church and, by implication, are to receive the teaching of the wider church (1 Cor 14:36)

- those who are prophets or who believe they are led by the Spirit need to acknowledge this teaching as a command of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37)
- there are consequences for those who ignore this teaching (1 Cor 14:38).

This understanding of the texts, in particular the command of the Lord, and the desire to continue to find joy in being faithful to Christ and the Gospel, is the main basis for urging the church to uphold the public teaching of the LCA. Even though there is a process in the church for discussing and debating the issue, the LCA currently teaches that the ordination of women is forbidden in Scripture, and bishops, pastors and members of the church have committed to uphold that teaching. While it is granted some Lutheran churches do ordain women, there are also many Lutheran Churches in the wider world that do not ordain women, even when there is overwhelming pressure, both from some quarters of the wider Lutheran communion, and from some cultures, to do so.

It is acknowledged that individual people in the LCA hold varying personal opinions about the texts and even the current teaching of the church. Some are convinced about that teaching. Some are convinced that Scripture not only allows for but demands the ordination of women. Others are not so sure about that, but they do have some doubts about the teaching of the church. In some cases there is indifference about the whole discussion. However, biblical and theological certainty is needed to change the church's teaching. In fact, uncertainty is a reason to stand with the church of all ages and with the catholic ecumenical consensus which continues in the main to reject the ordination of women as a departure from the Lord's will.

In some cases, further study of the texts has not caused doubt about the clarity of Scripture or the church's teaching about the call and ordination of women, but has convinced people that the current teaching is indeed biblical, and they can have a good conscience confessing it. It has also highlighted the fact that even though all the arguments involved may not be understood, the teaching is not just based on the incidental personal opinion of one apostle, but is consistent with wider biblical teaching and apostolic practice. Such study, together with a desire to be faithful to the Lord and to biblical teaching, explains why there is a strong conviction to affirm the current teaching of the church even when that teaching is not held in some theological circles, and even more so perhaps in some cultural settings.

The implications of equal status in baptism

In the 1992 study paper *Women and the Ministry*, the possibility that Galatians 3:28 was a breakthrough for the discussion was raised (24). However, the paper then re-stated the church's teaching that 'Christ transforms all the relationships of Christians, but he does not abolish all role differences', and so, 'we can't draw any direct conclusions from Galatians 3:28 about how the office of the ministry or society should be structured' (26).

Increasingly, however, Galatians 3:26-29 has been used to argue for the ordination of women. One benefit of that discussion has been that it has helped the church to identify the key issues in the controversy concerning the use of this text. It is not in dispute that the text speaks of the common inheritance that all people receive in Christ, whether male, female, Jew, Greek, slave, free, by virtue of their baptism and faith. What has been controversial is

the way in which that baptismal reality is seen to be lived out in the divinely instituted orders of marriage and church, as well as how to talk about order and equal status in biblical terms when the culture has its own interpretation of those concepts and is not able to see how they can co-exist for the common good. How do these passages relate to one another at this point? Can Galatians 3:26-29 (a text which does not speak about the public liturgical life of the church) be used to draw conclusions for the ministry that are contrary to those taught in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 (texts which do speak about the public liturgical life of the church)? The church has previously said no.

Galatians 3:26-29 is a wonderful text about the unity Christians have in Christ Jesus. By virtue of their baptism, men and women do have the same status before their heavenly Father as his children. As do Jews, Greeks, the free and the enslaved. However baptismal life is lived out in the divinely instituted orders of the church, marriage and the civic realm, and the Word of God speaks to each situation (see for example, the Household Charts of bible passage for all kinds of holy orders in the Small Catechism). In the case of pastoral ministry in the church the same Word which includes Galatians 3:26-29 includes 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14, texts which do speak about the public liturgical life of the church. These texts reinforce the teaching that even though all people share a common life as children of God by virtue of baptism and faith, their differences are not abolished by that reality, but sanctified for service in different ways in different orders. In the church, women are not to serve as public teachers, as pastors, but are called to be students of God's Word (1 Tim 2:11).

Does the Galatians passage promote a principle of equality and inclusivity which can then be used as a means to suggest a radical change in terms of the leadership of women in the church? Even if that conclusion were granted, which it isn't, what then of Jesus' own practice and the practice of the apostles? Jesus called and appointed only men as apostles (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:14-19; Luke 6:12-16). The apostles, after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the death of Judas, appointed one of the men (Greek, *andres*), as the replacement (Acts 1:21-22). If the baptismal inheritance abolishes all differences, that would have been enacted by Jesus and the apostles, especially in a society where women did take leadership in some pagan religious activities which meant that women in liturgical leadership would not necessarily have been culturally offensive.

Equal baptismal status and God-given order exist in a complementary way in marriage, family, church and society. By ordaining men only the church is not being unfaithful, but rather affirming its faithfulness to Galatians 3:26-29, 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14.

The issue of mission

Will the mission of the church be enhanced by the ordination of women? Some of the greatest numerical growth in the Lutheran church, and some of the areas of most productive confessional renewal are occurring in Lutheran churches that do not ordain women. That is no basis either to ordain or not to ordain women, but it does mean that the mission of God will continue if the LCA does not ordain women.

More significantly, Christ has directed the church, in the great mission mandate, to teach disciples *all* that he has commanded (Matt 28: 20). This includes the command of the Lord in 1 Cor 14:37. Paul, the great missionary, was also the same Paul who wrote the pastoral epistles, and there urged Timothy and other leaders of the early churches to keep the ‘pattern of sound teaching’, that is, the healthy words that build up the church, with faith and love in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:13). Sound teaching in any part of the world will strengthen the mission of God.

The issue of unity

Unity is not just a gift but also a task. In John 17:17-21 Jesus shows how central God’s Word, the apostolic witness to him, is for unity in the church. That is the basis for the gift of unity and also the focus as we seek to reach unity in our confession of faith. That is what has made this issue so difficult for the LCA. Those who contend for different understandings do love one another and do seek to remain united. Members of the church seriously have tried to speak the truth to each other in love, and to be faithful to passages such as 2 Thessalonians 3:15 (that is, to see each other not as enemies but as Christian brothers and sisters). At the same time, there is one significant difference that needs to be stated. If the ordination of women is promoted because it is seen to be an adiaphoron – something neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture – then by definition the issue of the ordination of women is not seen as church divisive. However, if it is not an adiaphoron, but is forbidden by the Lord in Scripture, as the church has historically taught and as many believe it should continue to teach, then for the church to change its teaching and practice has implications for the true spiritual unity of the church, even if there could be some way of remaining institutionally united.

Summary

The founders of the LCA, an evangelical and Gospel focussed church, taught in the [Theses of Agreement](#) that ‘1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments’. These are some of the biblical and theological arguments that underpin that teaching, and they explain why the church now should continue to confess, teach and affirm the ordination of men only.