

**EXECUTIVE OFFICE – LOCAL MISSION**

197 Archer Street North Adelaide SA 5006  
Tel 08 8267 7300 Fax 07 8267 7310  
[localmission@lca.org.au](mailto:localmission@lca.org.au)  
[www.lca.org.au/local-mission](http://www.lca.org.au/local-mission)

## **Renewal needs courage and imagination: Is the LCA ready?**

The Lutheran Church of Australia is 50 years young and she has plenty to celebrate. We can look back on our history since the union of two major synods in 1966 and see the hand of God in a myriad of places. From the growth of Lutheran schooling in Australia, to the establishment of diaconal ministries in aged care and community services, from the birth of congregations amongst new housing estates to the many and varied ways we have served our neighbours, both locally and internationally, the LCA has many reasons to thank God for His bounty and goodness.

The Lutheran Church of Australia is 50 years old and she has much to reflect on. We are a mature church with a fine theological institution that has trained and formed dedicated and faithful pastors, teachers and lay workers. We are both a rural church (with many of our congregations having less than 50 people attending worship each Sunday) and an urban church (with the majority of our larger congregations located in our cities). We're a church that prides itself on our theology, and have been a church that was largely reticent to engage in social and political issues such as injustice, poverty, violence, immigration and our impact on climate.

In human terms, the Lutheran Church of Australia is middle-aged, proud of its past and looking forward to what God has in store for us as we continue to mature. So, as we look forward to the future, and seek to do the Father's will, are we longing to mature graciously and with grace-filled lives, or are we going to retreat to safe ways of living and become set in our ways? Is the LCA on the brink of missional renewal or on a path to slow decay from a lack of imagination?

There are many signs that the LCA is on the brink of missional renewal. Many congregations are seeking to be places where families and young people are supported and nourished. These congregations are

finding new ways to ensure spiritual practices are intergenerational, and they recognise the importance of faith formation in the home, and the development of loving mentoring relationships. Other congregations have embraced and encouraged cultural diversity, while others are using media to reach a networked generation who do not necessarily connect in a geographic location. The LCA has also embarked on an ambitious plan to plant 30 congregations in ten years (is 'ambitious' the right word when it comes to the Spirit?!) These signs of missional renewal tell us that the Spirit is active as we strive to 'develop a missional culture where individuals, families and communities are inspired, passionate and active in sharing the gospel in word and action'<sup>1</sup>.

The LCA is on the 'brink' of missional renewal. As we continue to grow and mature, what are the next steps that move us forward on the journey to be renewed in mission? I would argue that the next steps require courage (some call it trust in God!) and a missional imagination (some call it an openness to where the Spirit leads). Have we the courage and imagination to conceptualise that congregations can look and feel vastly different from each other and still be following the risen Christ? Can we imagine congregations that are shepherded by leaders – leaders who may not have received the level of training of a general ministry pastor - who faithfully enter into a co-learning journey of discipleship? And are we ready to foster a life-enabling grace-filled permission-giving culture that discerns what the Spirit is up to in our midst and joins in?

LCA congregations already have tremendous and exciting diversity in outward practices while firmly based on sola scriptura, sola fide and sola gratia<sup>2</sup>. Embracing diversity, as opposed to ensuring uniformity, is a sign of missional renewal. In England, the *Fresh Expressions* movement began following a report in 2004 on the state of the Church of England and the need for a new missional direction. Fresh expressions are defined as "new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church'".<sup>3</sup>

A Fresh Expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through the practices of listening, service, contextual mission, and making disciples. It will have the potential

---

<sup>1</sup> LCA Strategic Direction 2013-2018

<sup>2</sup> Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone. The Protestant Reformation emphasised scripture over tradition, faith over works, and grace over merit.

<sup>3</sup> <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/> Retrieved 3/02/18

to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.<sup>4</sup>

As Christians in Australia and New Zealand increasingly come up against people who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', and as we encounter a society that shows the characteristic of post-Christendom, the need to speak into people's lives in fresh ways and via new forms becomes essential. The LCA's New and Renewing Churches department speaks of forming missional communities (or Love life communities) that may become church plants. These new communities are missional, contextual, formational and ecclesial in nature though may not look like the sending church that birthed the new community<sup>5</sup>.

The LCA has a number of church plants (fresh expressions) of its own. It is exciting to witness, within the LCA, the training of sending church leaders in situ, the development of missional communities and now the emergence of church plants<sup>6</sup>. So what is the link between this missional development and imagination and courage? The questions remains as to our readiness to accept, embrace and support the emergence of missional communities that may not look like a traditional Sunday morning worshipping community<sup>7</sup>. There is also a concern, from some sectors, regarding the leadership required for the emerging church plants due to the pressure on the ordained ministry<sup>8</sup> – an ecclesial and

---

<sup>4</sup>Carter, Kenneth H & Warren, Audrey. *Fresh Expressions: A New Kind of Methodist Church for People Not in Church*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2017, p 11

<sup>5</sup> Michael Moynagh (*Church in Life*, 2017, SCM Press, London, p3) describes new forms of church as

- Missional – through the Spirit, they are birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church.
- Contextual – they seek to serve their context and fit the circumstance of the people in it.
- Formational – their leaders aim to make disciples.
- Ecclesial – their leaders intend them not to be stepping stones to an existing church, but to become church for the people they reach.

<sup>6</sup> The LCA's church planting plan is found at [www.lca.org.au/new-churches](http://www.lca.org.au/new-churches) in the booklet [Church Planting: Plant Water Grow](#)

<sup>7</sup> The LCA plan is for the sending congregation to support the missional communities and emerging church plant until such time as the new community can become a congregation in its own right. This organisational reality requires the support of partner churches.

<sup>8</sup> The 2016 popular report *Pastoral Ministry in the Lutheran Church of Australia: A Snapshot Fifty Years after Union* states that:

'In line with all mainstream churches in Australia LCA pastors, as a professional group, are older and ageing faster than similar welfare service occupations in Australia. Up to one quarter of pastors, currently in pastoral ministry across the LCA, are eligible to retire within the next five years. This trend in ageing of the fraternity has implications for succession planning, recruitment and training for ministry over the next decade particularly with current LCA parish vacancy rates approaching 15-20%.'

organisational concern that was shared in Acts (read Acts 6:1-7)<sup>9</sup>. One could bemoan the small number of willing people who put their hand up for the pastoral ministry program at Australian Lutheran College and thereby could lead these emergent congregations, or one could embrace the exciting reality of burgeoning LCA church plants with the confidence that the Lord of the harvest will and is providing labourers. Perhaps our training and formation energy needs to more fully include and embrace the leaders of church plants. Another solution to the issue of the shortage of General Ministry Pastors, is re-imagining the Specific Ministry Pastor<sup>10</sup> as an evangelist or church planter. The sending church could call a Specific Ministry Pastor to work in the church plant/emerging congregation. Defining and acknowledging church planters and evangelists is an important next step for missional renewal.

The LCA is stepping towards a renewal of local mission. We are realising that 'mission' isn't simply something that missionaries do overseas. We are growing in our understanding that we are all called to be missionaries and our mission field (our neighbours) - that need to hear the good news of salvation - are in our families, in our neighbourhoods, in our workplaces and are right next door. But gone are the days of door-knocking, tele-evangelism, and revival rallies - we live in a society that is turned off by such overt displays of 'I've got something that you need'. We now live in a individualistic society that craves meaning and meaningful relationships. The LCA uses the term 'relational evangelism' to describe the long-haul process of meeting people where they are at, listening deeply to them, getting to know them and speaking the gospel into their circumstances. Its not an 'I've got all the answers approach'. It's a co-learning journey of faith. It requires genuine and authentic relationships and it may take time. We are assured, however, that the Spirit is active and we are simply assisting in God's work, God's mission.

As we boldly step into missional renewal, we will try new ways of engaging with the community. We need to be courageous and imaginative.<sup>11</sup> We understand, however, that we are likely to have set-backs and failures. Thank God we have the support of our local congregation, fellow Christians and, in the case of

---

<sup>9</sup> p98, Carter & Warren. "In the book of Acts, in order for the movement to keep going, the twelve disciples realized they could not do it all. So instead they appointed new disciples. This caused the formation of even more disciples. This scripture also brings to light that the work of the disciples is both missional and spiritual. For Fresh Expressions to be formed and sustained, discipleship is key."

<sup>10</sup> Seventeenth General Synod 2013: "The needs of the Church will, from time to time and in specific ministry situations of emergency and mission opportunity call for Specific Ministry Pastors to be prepared and called for ministry."

<sup>11</sup> Moynagh (in *Church in Life*, 2017) speaks of innovation and proposes an innovation framework.

church plants, the sending congregation. It's the support of the 'cloud of witnesses'<sup>12</sup> that will allow us to run the race and persevere.

Dr Tania Nelson

Executive Officer – Local Mission

---

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 12:1-3 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*