



**LUTHERAN
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Exploring a Lutheran theological identity for Aged and Community Services: a discussion paper

This paper has been produced to foster discussion regarding what is 'Lutheran' about Lutheran Aged and Community Services. The discussion paper is not intended to provide a definitive statement on a Lutheran theological identity. A statement may be a result after consultation and careful consideration. Rather, this paper is a means for local discussions to occur that feed into the Lutheran Church of Australia's (LCA) review of the governance of Aged and Community Services. Ultimately, it is the desire of the LCA Committee for Ministry with the Ageing to assist Aged and Community Services, through the provision of resources for inducting and training staff in theological identity, that is, in what it means to be a Lutheran Aged Care provider or a Lutheran Community service. This paper provides a beginning.

God created us

Lutheran Aged and Community Services, as part of the mission of the Lutheran Church of Australia, are communities that acknowledge God as creator and join in the ongoing creation and care of the world and all people. We believe that people are created, precious and loved children of God and that God desires that we love Him as He loves us. We are, however, broken and imperfect people. We call this condition 'sin'. We strive to make ourselves right, with God and with others, and we keep on failing.

Lutherans believe that we cannot restore our broken relationship with God, nor can we earn God's favour or love. Out of God's eternal love for all humanity, God restores us to full relationship with him by grace through the gift of faith.¹ Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all, we receive the eternal gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. Christians call this the gospel, God's good news for our lives. As a response to this grace from God entering our lives, we worship God as Lord of our lives, we witness to the good news of Christ's death and resurrection, and we join the compassion of God for all through our love and care of all.

¹ The Augsburg Confession (1530). Lutherans often reduce this core theological understanding to the catch phrase 'We are saved by grace, through faith, in Christ Jesus.'

God is loving and compassionate

The God who is revealed in the Bible is a loving God who shows compassion. The Bible is a record of God's love for humanity and records many instances of care for the poor and homeless, for unprotected people like widows and orphans, for victims of injustice and those who cannot defend themselves. God calls us to love and serve our family and friends and our neighbours and strangers. Jesus teaches his followers that to care for those in need is to reflect the very nature of God. Jesus not only teaches about love and service. He is active in healing the sick, showing hospitality to the outcasts and advocating for the marginalised. Jesus 'includes all who are in need and addresses all their needs: spiritual, material and physical. The standard cry of the needy in Jesus' presence is: "Lord, have mercy!" and he never fails to respond in compassion.'² This is a clear example that we too should show love and compassion.

For discussion:

Who are my neighbours?

Who, in my community or agency, is unprotected, a victim of injustice, or one who cannot defend themselves?

How could people in my community or agency experience God's love?

In what ways do these people experience God's love and compassion through me? What more can I do? What more can my community or agency do?

We are called to love

Christians continually experience God's love and compassion (his mercy) in being forgiven and renewed for a life of service to others. The church exists to not only care for its members but also for the world. It exists to tell the good news of God's love through its witness as well as through acts of love and care. The church has a long tradition of serving the needy through acts of service and through establishing institutions whose purpose is to care. 'The church's ministry of mercy is a vital part of its existence. It cannot exist without worship in which God speaks and acts in mercy and God's people respond in praise. It exists for witness to the Gospel. But the genuineness of both worship and witness

² From [One Loving God: Two Hands - Saving and Caring](#)

must be called into question where there is no ministry of mercy. Worship, witness and service belong together as functions of the church.³

We know that Christians are not the only ones who respond to people in need with care and compassion, and that people who are not Christians provide excellent services to those in need. For Christians, service is a way of responding to God's love and care and the provision of such service is one way of sharing Jesus' love in the world.

For discussion:

In what ways have I seen the good news of Christ Jesus shared through acts of love and service?

We act justly and for the good of all

Lutherans describe God as speaking and acting in two different ways, and in doing that they refer to God as having two hands. 'He works with his left hand using people as his servants to maintain peace, good order and justice in the world with people working in all kinds of situations and circumstances whether or not they realise that they are serving God's purposes. On the other hand, God works with his right hand when he works in mercy, forgiving sins and bringing people to faith in Jesus and working through them in his church.'⁴ Programs and agencies of Christian care and service grow out of the right hand work of God in the church, and they exist in the world – left hand work - in partnership with governments and charitable (not-for-profit) organisations. It is important to emphasise that Christians and non-Christians participate in God's ministry of mercy. The Lutheran teaching on vocation reminds us that people are God's agents⁵ in the world as we function as parents, and children, citizens, workers and carers. In our vocation – in our roles - we are asked to act justly and for the good of all⁶.

Every person has value by virtue of being made in and reflecting the image of God. The church's ministry to all people is to be a holistic one. We are called to love and serve people by catering for their physical, material, social, emotional and spiritual needs.

³ From [One Loving God: Two Hands - Saving and Caring](#)

⁴ Bartsch, Malcolm I, *A God who speaks and acts*. Available from <http://www.lutheran.edu.au/publications-and-policies/printed-publications/a-god-who-speaks-and-acts/>

⁵ Luther uses the term *masks of God* to describe how God works through people to carry out his work in the world. See Veith's chapter on 'Vocation' in *The Spirituality of the Cross*.

⁶ Lutheran Aged and Community Services are committed to the rights of residents and service recipients. See the following, as an example of a charter of which Lutheran Aged and Community Services gladly abide: [Residential Care - Charter of Care Recipients' Rights and Responsibilities](#)

For discussion:

What does it mean to regard each and every person as being made in the image of God?

How does knowing that all people have been created in the image of God affect how I relate to my colleagues, my manager or the people that come to me for help?

How can my community or agency minister holistically to people?

We bring God's love to life

By showing love and care to those in need, we are bringing God's love to life in our community. Such acts of service are offered graciously and unconditionally. Our care is offered because our 'neighbour' is in need of our service and support. Christ's ministry serves as a pattern for our life of service. We are called to use our God-given gifts to love and care for others.

For discussion:

How can I use the gifts that God has given me to show love and care to others?

How can I ensure that my community or agency is a place where love comes to life?⁷

Our calling comes from God

As we go about our work in Aged and Community Services our caring comes as a response to the blessings that God has given us and we acknowledge that our calling to care comes from God. We are assured that God is working through us, in our vocation, to people in need and we use the gifts and talents that God has given us to serve others.

Understanding the ministry of care in this way, informs all aspects of our work. We ensure that our community is accepting and inclusive. Our view of the ministry of care informs the culture or ethos of the community/agency, the duty of care of all people in the community/agency, resourcing for those in need, and the engagement and formation of staff and volunteers to care to the best of their abilities.

⁷ *Where love comes to life* is the tagline of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA). The LCA's vision is 'to see God's love in Christ coming to life in people everywhere through a Lutheran church that joyfully receives, lives and share the gospel.' For further information, see <http://www.lca.org.au/lca-strategic-direction-2013-2018.html>

For discussion:

How would I describe the culture within the community/agency where I am located?

What are the outward signs of the inner culture or ethos of the community/agency? How do people know that my community/agency is an accepting and inclusive community that is founded on Christian values?

I have a legal 'duty of care'. How can I move beyond my legal duty to care deeply for my neighbour?

Who are the vulnerable in my community/agency and how can this group be equitably cared for?

What training and support do I need to care to the best of my abilities?

Lutheran Aged and Community Services – an expression of the caring witness of the church

What makes a Lutheran Aged and Community Service distinctively Lutheran? To summarise:

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are communities that acknowledge God as creator and join in the ongoing creation and care of the world and all people.

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are communities that respond to people in need with care and compassion.

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are communities that act justly and for the good of all.

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are communities that love and serve people by catering for their physical, material, social, emotional and spiritual needs.

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are communities whose acts of service are offered graciously and unconditionally.

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are communities that acknowledge that the calling to care comes from God.

Lutheran Aged and Community Services are accepting and inclusive communities founded on Christian values.

Dr Tania Nelson

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where love comes to life