

AGENDA 3.1

LCANZ Bishop

*Don't be afraid. My love is stronger,
My love is stronger than your fear.
Don't be afraid. My love is stronger.
And I have promised,
Promised to be always near.*

Words: John L. Bell & Graham Maule.

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- 1 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:3)

INTRODUCTION

- 2 Throughout the 19th Synodical term, I have ‘reported’ via district conventions under the title ‘Reflections on the Church’. The most recent of these, on the church and the kingdom of God, was published as a Heartland eNews in May 2021. During the term I have released an additional 35 Heartland eNews editions, ten of them in the early days of COVID-19, plus a number of videos. With my monthly printed Heartland messages in *The Lutheran*. that totals more than 75 individual messages to the church since October 2018.
- 3 In this report I do not repeat those messages, or information you will read elsewhere in this Book of Reports – finances, governance, projects, resolutions from 2018, ministry reports and so on. In this report I offer some current reflections on the faith and affairs of the church, plus reports from the three ministry areas under my direct oversight: International Mission, Reconciliation Ministry and Public Theology.
- 4 We live in ‘liminal times’ between the resurrection and ascension of our Lord and his return in glory. On earth, they appear as thousands of years. In eternity, everything will be caught up in the single event of God’s redeeming work. Right now, on the ‘macro’ level we have a very fine vision indeed, through the Scriptural witness to what God is doing and what the future holds for us and all creation. That clear vision, with Christ at the centre, informs our whole lives – as a church and as believers. On the micro, granular level of the thousand and one things we need to do every day, however, we can get lost, even led astray, by the details and pressures of everyday life. When that happens, we must lift our eyes again to the higher vision to see what God is truly doing in the world.
- 5 We are confident about what the future holds – the return of Christ in glory and the resurrection of the dead. Week after week we confess that as truth. Day to day, however, there is still so much we do not know and have to work out for ourselves, including our immediate future. We must move forward without knowing the detail of every step. As we do so, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that, just because something worked in a certain way yesterday, it must do the same tomorrow. The world has changed, but sometimes we behave as though it hasn’t.
- 6 In this liminal time, we would be foolish to claim that we have the answer to everything. What we can be sure of is God’s open-hearted, unreserved and profligate love for the lost (e.g., Luke 15:11-32). We are recipients of that unending love, undeserving as we are.
- 7 God’s love is the key to the bold venture of faith that awaits us. This is our opportunity to freely share God’s unmeasurable gift of grace wherever, and with whomever, we can. I

believe that's what we are called to be and do – what's your view on that? Why do you think the LCANZ exists, and why are you a part of it?

WHO IS THE LCANZ AND WHY ARE WE HERE?

- 8 Who we are and why we are here are questions we need to openly face and explore. Some of the narratives we have used to explain our existence as a church do not work as well as they once did. As an organisation, we make assumptions about our identity that need to be explored, since they influence our attitudes, thoughts, words and actions.
- 9 On the positive side, something we need to recognise is our strong thirst and hunger to receive holy communion. That wasn't so strong 40-50 years ago, when we celebrated it far less frequently. COVID restrictions brought this to the fore once again, and many worshippers found the inability to commune most difficult. Among some of us, our passion for communion broke through into attempts to receive it online. I am thankful that practice did not spread too far, but it shows our deep desire to receive God's grace, forgiveness and new life in the body and blood of our Lord. Eternal life! It still motivates us. When it comes to core beliefs and practices such as Holy Communion, we find we do know what the church is and why it is here.
- 10 But in matters like culture, institutions, structures, and how we operate together and respond to the demands of a changed world, we seem far less certain. Things we have relied on for decades to give us a sense of purpose and direction mean far less now than they once did. In the 21st century the past feels like a distant country. The days of the 19th century forebears are long ago, and many LCANZ members have no direct connection with them. Neither do they know or remember the 20th century pioneers of Union. Today, we are writing our story of faith for future generations – let's not let them down.
- 11 The Lutheran Church and its confessions encapsulate the saving gospel in a unique way. Lutherans are at their best when they are a reforming movement in the whole Christian body. We are not an island entire unto ourselves. We owe our Christian (catholic) faith to the work of the Holy Spirit over generations of believers who have heard the call and followed Jesus Christ. We stand in a long line of witnesses who have given their all for Jesus.

MALE AND FEMALE PASTORS

- 12 Our long-term debate over ordination is a proxy argument over core matters of faith, what we believe about God, ourselves and the world we live in. Given our differences over this matter and the underpinning rationales represented in the arguments for and against, it's remarkable we stay together as well as we do. Surely, that's a sign of God's love and grace to be celebrated and not lightly discarded.
- 13 With all the best will in the world, sadly it is clear that the LCANZ has argued its way into deadlock. We have no umpire to declare the 'winner' and so we go around the block for the umpteenth time. It reminds me of the 1974 novel 'Something Happened' by Joseph Heller, author of Catch-22. In this book of over 576 pages, nothing happens. It might be masterly writing, but I simply couldn't bear it and had to stop reading before the end. Are people giving up on us for the same reason?
- 14 As we spend years intensely debating back and forth, we inevitably leave people behind or exclude them. They are weary, confused, hurt or in despair. Some give up entirely, others change churches. Once they were here, at the table with us, but their faces are gone for good. Do we care about them? I think we do, I think we want to, but I also think we don't know how to show it. We are afraid of letting down our guard, of being found wanting. We

struggle to be generous and open-hearted. We do not realise how our words and our actions cut others.

- 15 We are not going to solve this issue with further truth claims, even about Scripture. The only solution lies in our reason for being, God's love. What will we give up out of love for the other? When once again we debate this matter at a Synod or elsewhere, I pray we all approach it with a spirit of willing sacrifice, so that God may plant in us a spirit of peace, generosity and joy.
- 16 Personally, I would welcome women as pastors of the LCANZ. I have long withheld from saying that publicly, since this debate should not be about what the bishop thinks. You have sworn me to uphold the teaching and practice of the LCANZ, which I have done even though, in my heart, I have long believed otherwise on this matter. I can live and practice my faith in a church of the gospel which does not ordain women – as I have done all my life. But how much better it would be if we recognised, welcomed and honoured the divine calling of both men and women.
- 17 Whatever we decide, let's not do it out of fear, but only in the freedom of the gospel that is ours in Jesus Christ.

SUMMARY OF THE BISHOP'S ROLE BY PRESCRIBED DUTIES

- 18 The LCANZ bishop is expected to be a pastor, a leader, a manager/administrator and a problem solver, with a firm grasp on organisational dynamics, finances, how to chair a meeting, legal matters, the constitution and world affairs, particularly moral and ethical issues. He must also be a faith leader. It's a challenging role, particularly in a churchwide space, across our districts and multiple entities and organisations.
- 19 He has no direct peers in terms of his calling and responsibilities. There is no bishop 'training school' he can attend, or 'how to do it' manual in the office drawer. He learns about his duties while on the job through experience, intuition, trial and error, and much prayer. His formal 'job description' is the Constitution. He receives additional 'job descriptions' from LCA related organisations which require things of him, committees which he leads or is a part of, such as the General Church Board (GCB) and the College of Bishops (CoB), and by other church entities and individuals who want something from him. He must also find his place among the churchwide staff and among other churches on the ecumenical scene. This adds up to a large and sometimes contradictory role. He cannot, and in some cases should not, meet all the expectations placed on him.
- 20 The direct organisational lines that would allow him to do everything people expect of him, even if he thought that wise, do not exist in our non-hierarchical church. The LCANZ is somewhat loosely made up of many constituent parts, and the most important of those are at the grass roots. A rigid or authoritarian view of how we operate risks shattering our delicately balanced relationships. We are an organism, or a family. Each is a unique part of the whole and collectively we are learning how to survive and flourish. In any given situation we have multiple perspectives on how we should do that.
- 21 The bishop plays a support rather than controlling role as the church finds its direction through a multiplicity of options on a wide range of matters. The LCANZ can only function when God supplies a large amount of grace, tact, patience, perspicacity and passion for the gospel. And, of course, faith. Otherwise, all would be lost.

LCA BY-LAWS 8.2

8.2.1 THE BISHOP

8.2.1.1 THE BISHOP BY VIRTUE OF ELECTION SHALL

8.2.1.1.1 PREACH, TEACH AND ADMINISTER THE SACRAMENTS IN ACCORD WITH THE CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH, EXERCISING THIS MINISTRY IN CONGREGATIONS IN CONSULTATION WITH THE CONGREGATION AND PASTOR CONCERNED;

- 22 The Confessions – by which we mean the Book of Concord of 1580, no less and no more – point clearly to Christ and the core Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith. They are historically tested expositions of Scripture that bring us together around a common faith and a common purpose. The ‘core tasks’ of any confessional Lutheran pastor are preaching, teaching and administering the Sacraments. A pastor who becomes a full-time bishop, however, loses the immediacy of that ministry, as he can only carry it out ‘in consultation with’ other entities and individuals. He loses the specific locale of his core ministry, including his pastoral relationships with individual local believers or congregants which are the best feature of parish ministry. This can create an unhealthy environment for the bishop, distancing him from the ‘grass-roots’ work for which he became a pastor in the first place.
- 23 I believe there is a case for our bishops to be more ‘grounded’ in a local ministry of some kind. He needs a place where he is part of the local ministry team, however infrequently he might be able to take a lead role because of his wider duties. The LCANZ should at least consider this for all bishops at churchwide and district levels. We already have two bishops serving like that, in Western Australia and New Zealand, but for different reasons.

8.2.1.1.2 EXERCISE OVERSIGHT OF THE CHURCH, PROMOTE ITS SPIRITUAL WELFARE AND STRIVE TO PRESERVE PEACE AND ORDER;

- 24 During my time as bishop oversight has proven to be an ‘interesting’ word. Objectively, it means watchful care. Actively, it means to supervise or watch with attention (Macquarie Dictionary). Oversight does not mean control, manage, dictate or enforce. In that sense, it describes the role well as what I sometimes call the ‘helicopter view’ of the church. That is, a churchwide bishop gets to see the church from a unique perspective, seeing the LCA in its variations and different hues, nooks and crannies as very few others do.
- 25 Oversight is part of good order, keeping us headed in the right direction. Oversighting the church in this way is a little like the people of Israel who fled Egypt for freedom, but were soon confronted by the Red Sea with Pharaoh and his army in hot pursuit. Their predicament was frightening, and they looked for someone to blame. Our situation is not as viscerally physical as theirs, and none of us are about to die from it, but we can still feel trapped between an immovable object and a marauding host. We can’t run, and we can’t go back. Moses had oversight of the situation, could see what they could not, and so he said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid! Be brave, and you will see the LORD save you today... The LORD will fight for you, and you won’t have to do a thing’ (Exodus 14:13–14). Praise God who has already acted for us in Christ. My oversight role has been to keep that truth in plain sight, faith active in love.

8.2.1.1.3 EXERCISE OVERSIGHT OVER THE DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF ALL PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS OF THE CHURCH, DOING THIS IN ASSOCIATION WITH OR THROUGH THE RESPECTIVE BISHOPS OF THE DISTRICTS;

- 26 The LCANZ is put together, or structured, both from the bottom up and from the top down. The congregation is our traditional core unit – where the church is most church. A

'congregation' is essentially a local gathering of believers. They call a 'pastor' or an undershepherd to serve them. Multiple congregations gather to form the synod, and individually congregations sign up to it. Two of the main reasons they do so is to maintain true doctrine and practice, and to obtain suitably trained pastors. As congregations are scattered across a wide geographical area, the synod groups them into regions, or districts, for better support and oversight. In a nutshell, that's the LCANZ.

- 27 Congregations and pastors ask for, and agree to, the oversight of the LCANZ churchwide bishop, in fellowship with the district bishops. Bishops are pastors whom the church calls to a specific role. They are fully accountable to the synod, or their district. So, the LCANZ is bottom up and top down, which makes for some interesting dynamics.
- 28 This 'interesting' culture of oversight plays itself out in situations like the debate over the ordination of women. It is well-known that some congregations are pushing the Synod boundaries on who is authorised to preach and teach and administer the sacraments in the LCANZ. When challenged, congregations will quickly say that the preachers are authorised because the congregation has tested them, and it has the right to determine who may serve it, which is technically correct. Congregations in the synod whom this aggrieves want the bishop to publicly discipline or call out errant congregations for misbehaviour. The bishop, of course, is working pastorally and patiently, for the unity of the synod. Even if he was inclined to act harshly, the synod has deliberately limited his means to do so. My observation of how this works out in practice is that it takes us some years, rather than a sudden 'knee-jerk' reaction, to resolve our disputes and hold the synod together. Rapid, enforced action rarely results in the intended outcome and can fracture the fellowship irreparably (although God can fix anything). In exercising oversight, a bishop must take the long view, despite the pressure on him to act prematurely. This is not a failure on his part. It is simply a reflection of who we are as a church.

8.2.1.1.4 EXERCISE SUPERVISION OVER THE DOCTRINE, PRACTICE AND OFFICIAL CONDUCT OF ALL OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH, OF ALL BISHOPS OF THE DISTRICTS AND OF ALL THOSE WHO ARE ELECTED OR APPOINTED BY THE CHURCH;

- 29 The Macquarie Dictionary lists three potential meanings for 'exercise' in regard to the bishop's role:
 - to make use of (one's privileges, powers, etc.): to exercise one's authority.
 - to discharge (a function); perform: to exercise the duties of one's office.
 - to have as an effect: to exercise an influence on someone.All three can be applicable, but the most effective and meaningful is the third, to exercise an influence.
- 30 The individuals covered by this role requirement have changed significantly since the Constitution was first adopted 56 years ago, as have their call or employment situations. The churchwide bishop is not, formally, the executive head of church staff, and neither does he have direct line of sight over district bishops, each of whom are elected by and accountable to their respective synods. Doctrine and practice are one thing, and within his pastoral remit, even with its challenges. Supervision of 'practice and official conduct', however, is another thing entirely, and often beyond the scope and competencies of the office. This provision makes the bishop responsible for things over which he has no control.
- 31 In some situations, such as LCA Boards, Councils and Commissions, the bishop does have privileges he can exercise, but always with care. Over the years we have incorporated a number of legal entities which can limit his ability to engage. There are some situations to which he is intentionally refused entry, even into the room for discussion. Occasionally the door is firmly shut in his face, even by a district of the church. In short, your bishop cannot

carry out this duty across the whole church except in a very limited way. He must usually adopt the third option, *to exercise an influence*. Given the risks and complexity of modern industrial awards, complaints handling, insurance matters, Commonwealth Redress Scheme etc, that may be for the best.

8.2.1.1.5 ENSURE THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE PASTORS OF THE CHURCH IN ASSOCIATION WITH OR THROUGH THE RESPECTIVE BISHOPS OF THE DISTRICTS;

- 32 In fulfilling this duty, I have high regard, and respect for, your district bishops. This work is the major focus of the CoB. We are not perfect, but we are getting better at it. As churchwide bishop, however, my continual observation, matched by pastors who move between districts, is that in different places, and with different leaders, we do things differently. Yet LCANZ pastors are, on the whole, blessed with a well-formed and stable system that does everything it can to care for and guide them in healthy lives and ministries.
- 33 In today's church it is not only the district bishops who help me in this duty. I acknowledge the contribution of the Church Worker Support Department, its staff and the Manager, Dr Christine Materne. CWS works with me, the district bishops and the individual pastors to provide support, pastoral care and assistance where needed. CWS also works in the background to provide better policies, procedures, systems and strategies for the pastoral care of church workers.

8.2.1.1.6 BE THE OFFICIAL VISITOR TO AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE AND AS SUCH, IN FULFILMENT OF THIS ROLE, SHALL

8.2.1.1.6.1 ASSURE HIMSELF AND THEREBY THE CHURCH THAT THE TEACHING AND PRACTICE OF AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE IS IN ACCORD WITH THE PUBLIC TEACHING AND PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH;

8.2.1.1.6.2 BE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE PASTORAL CARE TO THE PRINCIPAL; AND

8.2.1.1.6.3 SATISFY HIMSELF THAT THE APPROPRIATE PASTORAL CARE IS AVAILABLE FOR THE STAFF OF AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE;

- 34 The term 'official visitor' isn't used so much these days, but the relationship between the churchwide bishop and ALC is an essential one. The main method of 'assuring' himself about the teaching and practice of the College is the same as that of other pastors and institutions of the church – oversight. He is obviously not present in every classroom (physical or virtual) and he does not study every course outline, read every paper or watch every webinar.
- 35 ALC, the teaching college of the LCANZ and essential to our integrity, also operates within a University environment in which academic freedom and open enquiry are encouraged. That is fertile soil in which to examine, test and expand our thinking on matters of public teaching and practice. The Lutheran movement was born out a university environment, and Luther's devotional and academic research into the Bible – what it says on the page and how it says it – using the tools available to him, were instrumental in bringing about the Reformation. ALC also operates in a Vocational Training environment, which is becoming more important in meeting the ministry needs of the church, and is to be encouraged.
- 36 I have regularly made myself available to the Principal, and also discussed with him the pastoral care of staff. That was particularly important in the last Synodical term when ALC significantly reduced staffing levels, and again when calls to serve at ALC were formally transferred from the GCB to the ALC Board.

8.2.1.1.7 ORDAIN APPROVED CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY AND INSTALL BISHOPS OF THE DISTRICTS AND ALL THOSE ELECTED OR CALLED TO SPIRITUAL OFFICES OF THE CHURCH, OTHER THAN THE PASTORAL MINISTRY;

37 Since last General Convention I have ordained, or deputised the ordination, of pastors:

- 2018 —Matthew Edgecombe, Lucas Matuschka, Mathew von Stanke
2019 —Paul Calnan, Ronald Lee, Jim Luan, Shaun Manning, Andy Marr, Peter Noble, Carl Richter, David Seligman, Lindsay Thomas, Lee van Rossen, James Ruei, Jeffrey Wheeler
2020 —Roland Adams, Philip Bentley, Christopher Johnson, Stephen Noblett, Joseph Theodorsen
2021 —Stanley Roberts, *Michael Hauser (serving in PNG – delayed due to COVID)*
I currently expect three ALC graduates will present for assignment and ordination later in 2021.

38 In 2020 I recognised Pastor James Luk as a General Ministry Pastor of the LCA (formerly a Specific Ministry Pastor).

39 Since last General Convention I have installed:

- 2018 —Pastor Michael Jacobsen (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, guest pastor) as Finke River Support Pastor for the Alyawarr language area
2019 —Assoc Prof Lisa Schmidt as Director of Lutheran Education Australia
Pastor Matt Anker as Assistant to the Bishop – International Mission
Pastor Robert Bartholomaeus as Bishop of the NSW and ACT District
Dr Nigel Long as Secretary of the Church
2020 —Ross Smith as Chief Executive Officer of the Lutheran Laypeople's League
2021 —Pastor Nathan Hett as Pastor for and Manager of New and Renewing Churches
Pastor Mark Vainikka as Bishop of the Queensland District (anticipated as at report date, COVID-permitting)

In 2020 I also 'reinstalled' ALC teaching staff when their calls were transferred from the GCB to the ALC Board.

8.2.1.1.8 ARRANGE COLLOQUIES OF PERSONS SEEKING TO ENTER THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH;

40 Since last General Convention I arranged colloquies for the following pastors:

- Peter Cass (Uniting Church)
- Meelis Rosma (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Estonia)
- Ronald Lee (Queensland Asian community)
- James Ruei (Victoria, Sudanese community)
- Jeffrey Wheeler (LCANZ Central Australia)
- Andy Marr (LCANZ New Zealand)
- Lindsay Thomas (LCANZ Central Australia)
- Arthur Rickman (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, USA)
- Peter Ravikumar (Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church, India)
- Deane Meatheringham (Uniting Church, emeritus)
- Timothy Muller (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, USA, returning to LCA)
- Nicholas Mullen (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, USA)
- Stanley Roberts (LCANZ Central Australia)
- John Keller (Queensland)

8.2.1.1.9 OFFICIALLY REPRESENT THE CHURCH IN RELATIONS WITH OTHER CHURCH BODIES AND OTHER AGENCIES, UNLESS THESE RIGHTS HAVE BEEN DELEGATED BY THE CHURCH TO OTHER PERSONS;

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA (NCCA)

- 41 The NCCA (www.ncca.org.au) is an ecumenical council of member Australian Christian Churches. It gathers together Churches and Christian communities which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures. We commit to deepen our relationship with each other and to work together towards the fulfilment of common witness, proclamation and service, to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It currently lists 19 churches as members.
- 42 The LCA (Australia only) has been a participating member of the NCCA since 1998. In that time two pastors have been Presidents (Drs Lance Steicke and Michael Semmler) and one has been General Secretary (myself). In 2013, as a church leader, I became a member of the leadership group, at that time called the Executive. This was restructured in 2016 and I was elected as a Director on the new NCCA Board, from which I voluntarily retired in October 2020.
- 43 Since the restructure, LCA participation has mainly been through Board membership, attendance at Assemblies, which engage specialist topics of interest to the churches in an ecumenical environment with input from expert speakers, the Faith and Unity Commission, attendance at Forums (similar to our Conventions of Synod) and other ad hoc matters, such as working on shared responses to legislation.

LUTHERAN CHURCHES ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

- 44 We maintain friendly relationships, without formal fellowship, with numerous Lutheran churches. During the Synodical term, in addition to mission partnerships (see International Mission) we have had direct dealings with
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
 - Lutheran Church – Canada
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
 - Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria
 - Lutheran Church Malaysia
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church Malaysia
 - Lutheran Church Philippines
 - Lutheran Church of Singapore
 - Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church
 - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
- 45 The LCA NZ has full fellowship only with the Lutheran churches in Papua New Guinea (primarily through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea) and the Lutheran Church – Canada.
- 46 We have a formal agreement with the Lutheran Church of Finland for the Suomi Conference, by which we welcome Finnish pastors and congregations on our shores.
- 47 We have Memoranda of Understanding and other working arrangements with a range of churches for specific purposes, particularly in mission.
- 48 During the Synodical term we have enjoyed the services of ‘guest’ pastors from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, the

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (Lutheran Church of Bavaria), the Lutheran Church Singapore, and possibly others I have overlooked.

- 49 The LCA's closest and most enduring overseas relationship is with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. Recently, we have mutually opened up a burgeoning friendship with the Lutheran in the Philippines, to the extent that Dr Michael Lockwood is serving in the seminary in Baguio City. We believe that there is much we can share, and the LCANZ will grow through this friendship as it unfolds.
- 50 Please see Part 02 of this report (International Mission) for information on the LCANZ's mission engagement with Lutheran churches internationally.
- 51 I share our representation to these churches with the Assistant to the Bishop – International Mission, and occasionally with other LCA personnel who are travelling. Obviously, this activity has been severely curtailed since early 2020, but we have maintained contact through other means, some frequently and some much less frequently, depending on the circumstance. Internationally, several Lutheran leaders have died as a result of COVID-19.

GLOBAL LUTHERAN BODIES

- 52 Following the last General Convention, we set about exploring the possibility of full memberships in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC). In late 2019 Pastor Matt Anker and I, while in Europe for a seminar organised by the Bavarian church, took the opportunity for initial formal engagements with the ILC President in Hanover, and the LWF office in Geneva.
- 53 We were warmly received in both settings and the conversations were productive and highly promising. In the overall plan, this was an opening foray to inviting representatives of both organisations to Australia for deeper and fuller conversations, including between the two organisations on our soil, with their agreement. We were well on the way to achieving this, to the point of making their travel arrangements, when COVID intervened. As a result, the project was put on hold, as reported by the GCB to this Convention. The work, including that done by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations in preparation, will not be wasted, and I encourage the LCANZ to pick this up again as soon as possible once travel restrictions ease.
- 54 Of course, it is entirely possible that the project will not be required should this Convention approve the proposal put to it by Holy Cross Belconnen, that we proceed with applying for full membership in both organisations. While I understand the reservations some have about that, to me it would be a wonderful, if somewhat overdue, step forward after severing external relationships in 1966 for the sake of the union at home. Now it is surely time for the 'new' (now not so new) LCANZ to step confidently and maturely onto the world scene and take its legitimate place at the table. If we believe some things need to be said or done differently, the best way to make that happen is to be in the room, with a vote, where our voice will be respected. We will also be surprised at the riches we will gain and the wisdom we will learn.

8.2.1.1.10 PRESIDE OVER ALL CONVENTIONS OF THE GENERAL SYNOD, SUBMIT THE REPORT OF THE BISHOP AND SUPERVISE THE EXECUTION OF ALL SYNODICAL RESOLUTIONS;

- 55 I supervise the 'execution of all synodical resolutions' primarily through the GCB and the work of the Executive Officer of the Church. Please see those reports for this information.

**8.2.1.1.11 BE PRESENT AT THE CONVENTIONS OF THE SYNODS OF THE DISTRICTS, OR
APPOINT A DEPUTY, AND SUBMIT THE REPORT OF THE BISHOP;**

56 In the last Synodical term, I was present at the following District Conventions (not including Pastors Conferences):

- South Australia – Northern Territory District: 2
- Victoria – Tasmania District: 2
- Queensland District: 1
- New South Wales – Australian Capital Territory District: 1
- Western Australia District: 1
- Lutheran Church of New Zealand: 2

Total District Conventions attended: 9

57 COVID-19 restrictions have impacted heavily on this duty. What I have missed most is being among the gatherings of the church, getting a sense of where people are at and what they are most interested in, and feeling the pulse and mood of the church.

**8.2.1.1.12 CALL AND PRESIDE OVER MEETINGS OF THE GENERAL CHURCH BOARD AND ITS
EXECUTIVE AND THE COLLEGE OF BISHOPS;**

58 Since last General Convention:

- General Church Board
 - Number of days of presiding over meetings – approx. 41
 - Number of formal written reports to the GCB - 15
- College of Bishops
 - Number of days of presiding over meetings – approx. 45

59 We must reconsider the requirement for the LCANZ Bishop to preside over meetings of the GCB. At the very least, we need to define what ‘preside over’ means, and whether it is the same or different to ‘chair’. I understand the intent is to respect his authority and provide order to the church’s spiritual and pastoral purposes. In the contemporary governance environment, however, the requirements of chairing include many responsibilities and duties that take the Bishop into realms not originally intended, to do with finance, legal issues, compliance, risk, and so on. Technically, it also requires him to take a ‘neutral’ stance on issues in order to facilitate discussion. This can restrict his intentional contribution, muting it in comparison to what he might offer if he were not ‘presiding over’ as the chair.

**8.2.1.1.13 PROVIDE FOR THE CALLING OF PASTORS OR ANY OTHER CHURCH WORKERS
NEEDED FOR THE INSTITUTIONS AND/OR DEPARTMENTS OF THE CHURCH,
UNLESS SUCH POWERS HAVE BEEN DELEGATED BY THE CHURCH TO BOARDS,
COUNCILS OR COMMISSIONS OR OTHER PERSONS; [AND]**

60 According to established practice, chaplains, directors and other ordained and non-ordained church workers are regularly called into institutions of the Church without reference to the churchwide bishop. This has long been assumed under (unspoken and unwritten) delegations.

61 In those areas under my care in the churchwide office, this Synodical term I have provided for the calling of pastors Matt Anker (International Mission), Stuart Kleinig (Interim Ministry Pastor – Reconciliation) and Nathan Hett (New and Renewing Churches). I have assisted in the calling and/or appointment of other workers through the departments of the church, such as Lisa Schmidt (LEA) and Craig Heidenreich (Cross-Cultural Ministry).

8.2.1.1.14 BE ENTITLED TO ATTEND MEETINGS OF ALL THE BOARDS, COUNCILS, DEPARTMENTS, STANDING COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS OF THE CHURCH AND SHALL RECEIVE DUE NOTICE OF ALL MEETINGS.

- 62 This final duty is intended to grant the churchwide bishop access to whatever is going on in the church that needs his attention. In theory, it allows him access even when not specifically invited and prevents meetings being held without the wider church's knowledge, which would imply very low levels of trust.
- 63 LCA entities generally do not, however, have an equivalent reciprocal provision written into their own rules, and many would not even consider it. This is unsurprising, given modern governance structures. Most of my engagement, therefore, beyond churchwide operations, is by occasional invitation. In a tense moment (which had nothing directly to do with the bishop), one district church council purposefully barred me from its meeting, which at the time I found quite unjustified and upsetting. The LCANZ would do well to revise this duty, and/or create the circumstances which would allow it to be carried out.
- 64 Many Church entities do not consider due notice of meetings to the bishop to be relevant to their business. As there are currently so many it would probably be confusing in any case.
- 65 In its current format, this duty reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how contemporary organisations work. It is not observed because a) it gives the instruction to the wrong person b) there's no mechanism to enable it and c) it's probably irrelevant these days anyway. Instructing church entities what they should do through the duties of the bishop simply doesn't work. If he attempts to enforce it, he only creates misunderstanding and ill-will. If such a requirement is considered necessary it must be translated into the duties of the Boards, Councils, Departments, Standing Committees and Commissions of the Church.

SUPPLY OF PASTORS IN THE LCANZ

WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR THE ORDAINED MINISTRY?

- 66 People often ask bishops this question for a number of reasons, such as:

- Their congregation is in a vacancy and can't seem to attract a pastor
- They are critical of current arrangements for training and supplying pastors and have their own ideas of how it could be done better
- They don't like their pastor, or feel their choices to call a new one are too limited
- Their congregation is nearing, or has passed, the time when it can afford to pay a full-time pastor, or it is facing realignment or organisational changes at the local level
- They have attended a Convention or similar meeting where they have seen statistics about the ageing pastorate and a future a shortage of pastors
- They think too many pastors are tied up in institutions or 'desk' jobs
- They hear that the ALC graduating class will produce only three prospective pastors (2021)
- They think the LCANZ should decide to ordain women.

HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT OUR CURRENT SYSTEM?

General Ministry Pastors

- 67 The training and preparation of pastors for the ministry is core to the Synod and our longest, most concerted program since our inception in 1966, and before that in the former synods. In earlier years Lutherans in Australia and New Zealand obtained pastors wherever they could get them, using methods that today would surprise and probably alarm us. As the church in our region grew in maturity it grew more serious about providing pastors

locally for local needs. Seminaries sprang up, which in the late 1960s came together as Luther Seminary, now Australian Lutheran College (ALC), with which Lutheran Teachers College was merged in the 1970s.

- 68 The current ALC campus, which today we are struggling to fully utilise, is clear evidence of the LCANZ's deep desire to train its own pastors and train them well. When it opened in 1968 the financial appeal for the new infrastructure, an ambitious expensive and extremely modern program for the time (witness the modernist, brutalist architecture of the buildings on the site alongside the 19th century originals) was oversubscribed.
- 69 The training of pastors is still the largest continuing single project the LCANZ undertakes. Churchwide financial support for ALC is drawn solely from the proceeds of congregational offerings, over recent years to the tune of AU\$1.2–1.4 million per annum. The full ALC budget is, of course, larger than that. The dedication and commitment of students training to be pastors and their spouses and families is evident in the HEP debt they accumulate through FEE-HELP, the commitment to 5-years of full-time training which takes them away from home, extended family, and alternative careers.
- 70 As stated elsewhere in this report, the Lutheran movement was born out of a university environment, which enabled the free and unencumbered reading of Scripture in the languages in which it was written. Martin Luther was the beneficiary, not the creator, of this system and we have inherited his same love for the Word and desire to translate the gospel into modern life for all people.
- 71 So, it is appropriate that the first form of training for Lutheran pastors follows a model of academic learning and spiritual formation over a concerted period of time. This training prepares them to begin ministry. It does not replace the practical skills and learning that must take place in the field among the people and parishes of the church. Lutheran pastors are trained to be life-long learners. We really need such pastors.
- 72 We call a pastor trained in this way a 'General Ministry Pastor' (GMP). The LCANZ can call them into any ministry which is recognised and ordered by the church. Among the advantages are a highly trained individual with demonstrated commitment who has the training and learned skills to set about ministry, work and grow with the people, and rightly discern law and gospel both in theory and in practice. Among the disadvantages are the high financial cost (to the church, ALC and the student himself), academic pressures to complete a double degree in five years, the limitations academic structures place on extended field work (vicarage) and, increasingly in the 21st century, the dislocation of the individual and family from the local communities of the church for an extended period.

Specific Ministry Pastors

- 73 Praise God, there is more demand for pastors in the church than the GMP training program can provide. This demonstrates people's hunger for the word of God and the reception of the sacraments.
- 74 For a while there was a trend to licence laymen to fill the role of a pastor under the supervision of a pastor – called 'lay licensing'. Since Lutheran teaching requires ordination for the ministry of word and sacrament, such licensing was only ever meant to be auxiliary and short-term. Given the way of things, however, a contingent plan such as this started to become more widely used than intended and sometimes the basic ground rules were overlooked just to get the job done.
- 75 In time the bishops (then called presidents) identified this tendency and so framed another structure for ordination called 'Pastor with Alternate Training' (PWAT). Over time this morphed into 'Specific Ministry Pastor' (SMP). In this format, SMPS are fully ordained pastors with all the normal requirements of the role, including life-long learning.
- 76 The original structure sees an SMP raised up by locals as a person suitable to be their pastor. They undergo assessment and some training, and with the support of the district apply to the CoB to enter the SMP training program. Along the way, in need, the district bishop might use his authority to temporarily licence them for Word and Sacrament ministry. Once the candidate is ready, and the church is ready, and the call is ready and accepted, then the CoB will agree to ordination, which the churchwide bishop does as part of his role. The training program, run by ALC, continues for the duration of the SMP's ministry.
- 77 While this is the original structure, in the 'real world' there are many variations according to circumstances. The SMP program is not a one-size-fits-all program but is adapted for the person and the circumstances. All our current Aboriginal pastors, for instance, are technically SMPs in this sense. SMPs are ordained for a specific ministry in a specific place.
- 78 Nevertheless, the LCANZ recognises only one order of the ministry, whether SMP, GMP or bishop (all of whom are GMPs). Therefore, in terms of ordination, there is no distinction. Practically, on the ground, however, distinctions do exist, in that an SMP cannot technically be called into another ministry. There is understandable pressure for that to change, and exceptions are occurring. Further, in the past, an SMP was not granted 'emeritus' status on retirement, which we have recently rectified.
- 79 The SMP program has proven eminently successful. The challenge before us now is to take stock of that success and evaluate what this means for the LCANZ's ministry overall. Here's a few considerations for that evaluation:
- The LCA should not surrender the principle that its pastors are properly trained with a sound understanding of the Word and a good grasp on how the church gathers and functions.
 - We will always need a blend of pastors – not all will be brilliant academics and not all will be gifted practitioners. God calls a variety of people according to his own needs in ministry.
 - We need to consider 'pathways' by which SMPs can become 'GMP's, either through further study or recognition of prior (life) learning.
 - Most GMPs are paid, generally in a full-time capacity. Only a handful of SMPs receive similar compensation for their work. Many you would call 'tent-makers' in that they hold down other jobs or run businesses and conduct ministry as well. In most SMP settings, a full-time salary would cripple the local congregation.
 - We have some contradictory practices, such as intentionally not sending GMP graduate pastors back to their home congregations. Essentially, however, that is

exactly where an SMP serves – in his home congregation. Why the difference? Is one better or worse than the other? Has the LCANZ in the past undervalued the community links that enable a pastor to function well among the people?

- A number of imbalances, maybe injustices, exist in the current system. SMPs are fully ordained pastors but they are not allowed to participate in a General Pastors Conference or be delegates to a General Convention. Many of them wonder why. The current arrangements create the impression of an exclusive group of male GMP pastors. This is surely not our intention, and as time goes on and our circumstances change, we must seriously reconsider these restrictions.

Lay Licensing (Word and/or Sacrament)

- 80 Although not considered the norm, lay licensing is still used where there is need. There is no assumption that a layperson who steps up to help in a time of need wants to become a pastor!
- 81 Such licensing is authorised by the district bishop and takes place under the oversight of a designated pastor. It is not regarded as permanent or ongoing but is reviewed and renewed on an annual basis.
- 82 The LCANZ has work to do in the church planting / New and Renewing Churches space about whether the designated Church Planter could or should be a) licenced or b) ordained or c) neither. Mechanisms already exist for each eventuality, but all the same there seems to be growing agitation around this, possibly caused by lack of information or communication, and resulting confusion about what can and can't be done. Whatever decisions are made, all should be done 'decently and in order' for the sake of the gospel, so we don't confuse people about the message of hope we carry.
- 83 The CoB recently approved a training course for lay preachers through ALC. It is intended for those who have been authorised for this role in their respective location under the oversight of the district bishop.

Further thoughts from the bishops on the LCANZ's need for and deployment of pastors

- 84 We encourage the church to pray to God to send workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:35-38). Of course, pastors are only some of those workers, certainly not all of them!
- 85 We look to church members to encourage people to consider becoming a pastor. This isn't helped when we 'talk down' the ministry or the church in casual conversation. We might have cause to be unhappy or disturbed about some things, but that should not mean we act against the church. Individually we are all part of the church, and by dragging it down we drag ourselves down. How will people consider ministry if we speak negatively about it? In Ephesians 4:11 St Paul encourages us to think of the gifts God gives the church, among them pastors.
- 86 We currently have more clergy per head of confirmed members than ever before in the history of the LCANZ. According to the National Church Life Survey the LCA will seriously decline in numbers in the next 10-15 years as the current generation dies. That sounds brutal, but pastoral supply is linked to an aging church and pastoral need. Case studies have been done and are continuing in this area, and they need to be unpacked.
- 87 We have work to do to evaluate and develop consistent pre-call approaches which link a congregation's expectations of a pastor and a pastor's expectations of a congregation more to the Rite of Ordination and the Letter of Call. The current process can sometimes foster unrealistic expectations and clergy dependency if it encourages congregations to think there are only one or two pastors who can actually serve them because of their 'uniqueness'. And the same, vice-versa, for pastors.

88 Develop resources that:

- teach congregations that their primary calling is their 24/7 life in the world.
- that help congregations move from being congregations to being 'preaching places', or from independent congregations to inter-dependent congregations sharing pastoral supply.

89 Develop consistent entry pathways for GMP and SMP study programs. Currently the bar is getting higher and higher for GMP pastors and potential students are sometimes dissuaded from offering themselves too early in the process. At the same time, we do not apply the same entrance principles to the SMP program. This leads to disparity and uneven pathways.

90 People sometimes comment that the LCANZ would do well to develop once more a more intentional diaconal program and educate the Church about its value. Not everything is about pastors!

91 Some of us think that, ideally, distinctions such as GMP and SMP should gradually be phased out as we develop a comprehensive understanding of the pastorate that best meets our needs in the 21st century. The ministry is changing, and the LCANZ must work in that situation to retain the integrity of its ministry and the supply of pastors across the church.

THE LCANZ AND EDUCATION

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

92 Lutheran schools have long been highly valued and regarded by Australian Lutherans. So much sacrificial work has gone into establishing and maintaining schools for the purposes of education and mission. Begun in an era when the state could not be relied on to provide education, they have continued as missional outposts of the church. In fact, most schools are no longer church outposts. They are their own entities with their own identities. What they do, they do well. Their purpose, intentionality, innovation and dedication to purpose are to be admired. In most cases, they do not 'need' the church in order to 'survive'. Occasionally, the restrictions that result from being part of the church can hamper their desire to do something – such as employ a wonderful, competent principal who is not a Lutheran. I think it is time the Church reset its relationship with Lutheran schooling.

93 Lutheran schools flourish in a competitive marketplace, with one eye on attracting enrolments, another on expanding educational offerings, another on best practice and innovation in learning and teaching, another on finances and servicing debt, another on sector and regulatory requirements for accreditation, another on staffing, management and governance, and another on Church requirements. Add to that falling numbers of staff and leaders who are (reliable) members of the Church, and greater difficulties in obtaining Lutheran volunteer board members. This creates a potent and powerful mix through which to negotiate one's way. Churches founded schools for mission, but they are also multimillion-dollar not-for-profit businesses (usually by means of servicing debt).

94 Now I go where angels fear to tread. I feel an overwhelming sadness at what seems to me a deteriorating relationship between Lutheran Education Australia (effectively, the LCANZ) and our three regional School entities. Pressure is on to establish relationships based on quasi or actual commercial Service Level Agreements. Unless those involved take great care, this will create a toxic environment and our genuine, heartfelt fellowship in faith and mission will quietly slip away. I do understand the stated reasons driving the desired change, but it is not being handled as well as it needs to be, even at the highest level. This is partly our changed culture, partly the changed regulatory environment, partly the sheer amount of dollars involved, partly a changed focus on the part of regional school leadership under regulatory pressure, and partly a loss of our shared faith and community memory on

- how these relationships work, which cannot be defined purely through institutional or service provision terms.
- 95 In a preliminary way I have raised the topic of ‘reimagining’ the church’s relationship with schools (and vice versa) with Lutheran Education Australia, the General Church Board, the three regional directors, and one or two principals. I also want to speak about it at the Lutheran Principals Conference in September 2021.
- 96 The LCANZ would be wise to face reality and move away from the concept of ‘owning’ schools. A school can be Lutheran without having to come under the ‘control’ and ‘ownership’ of the LCANZ. Schools could be much more agile, and so could the church, under alternative arrangements. Realistically, churchwide, we do not own schools, Various bodies in various constituencies own them in various ways. As LCANZ, however, we still seem to think and act as though we do own and control them – please note, I am not writing about or wanting to comment on local and regional arrangements. I am talking only at the churchwide level of the tension and ample grief that our continued behaviours and assumptions are causing to all involved, along with untold and unnecessary hours of meetings and negotiations and sleepless nights.
- 97 Amid this, the patterns of ministry and pastoral care that schools maintain – those parts the church is rightly enthusiastic about – are truly remarkable. Church and school are quite different types of entities, albeit with a significant overlap of purpose in winning souls for Christ. I do not doubt the desire and the commitment of Lutheran schools to be Christian and to practice faith in their daily working environment. I hear many encouraging stories about that. It’s just that what the Church is asking of them, organisationally, is not working as well as we intend.
- 98 I often hear about how the Church’s reputation is flagging among schools. The evidence of that, apart from difficulty in maintaining Church involvement in numbers of students, staff and leaders, is in the breaches or exceptions to the LCA Staffing Policy, schools eschewing the LLL and turning to commercial for-profit banks for loans while the church stands guarantor (after all, boards are accountable to seek the best financial deal for their schools), and the poor relationships we suffer from following the well-intended but ill-fated LEA governance review. It will still take some time for us to recover from that. Sadly, more open hostility has been directed at me during some high-level education meetings than at Synod during the heat of the ordination debate. Down at the school level relationships are always convivial. But at the regional and LEA levels, organisationally they can be tense indeed. No one needs that.
- 99 I emphasise again that I am only referring to Churchwide activities, not to the three regions and certainly not to any individual schools. I have no desire to touch those carefully worked out arrangements. We have neither the authority nor the good will to do so, even if we might think some things could be done better. Churchwide, the LCANZ will be of most help to Lutheran education when it acknowledges the changed landscape and revolutionises its model of interaction accordingly, stepping back from institutional ownership patterns and stepping up with stronger faith and spiritual patterns of engagement and support. Along the way, this would signify refocussing and recasting the role and function of LEA.
- 100 We in the LCANZ need to learn more about how to encourage and support Lutheran educators as genuinely, authentically, and even excitedly ‘Lutheran’ people. We must bless them with a deep appreciation of ‘Lutheran’ that runs deeper and stronger than jumping through hoops, institutional membership or rusted-on denominational loyalty. This implies a love for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which is richly imbued with an appreciation of our freedom in faith and how it applies in life in the world and in the church. Such a revised focus is essential in a time when the former Lutheran Teachers College trained staff are departing the scene. They have been the cultural ‘glue’ which has held us together for so long.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

101 In this, my last report to the LCANZ, I record my ongoing dismay at our seemingly scant regard for the great majority of children who are educated at state and other schools. We provide little (other than perhaps through GROW Ministries) for the great majority of children, including Lutherans, who attend state and other schools, and those who work there as paid and volunteer staff, and their families.

CONCLUSION

- 102 This is my final report as churchwide bishop. It will soon be time for a new bishop to take up the reins.
- 103 As I conclude my service, I acknowledge the dedicated service and support over the last Synodical term of many people, paid staff and volunteers. I started compiling a list, but I owe so much to so many that when I got to one-and-a-half pages I decided it was too impractical to name everyone. I should make special mention, however, of just a few.
- The LCANZ Executive Team:
 - Peter Schirmer as Executive Officer of the Church. Without Peter's gentle encouragement and patient persistence, so many things simply wouldn't happen.
 - Nigel Long as Secretary of the Church. In many respects Nigel is the day-to-day bishop's 'right hand' in so many matters, taking care of many things others rarely notice.
 - Tania Nelson as Executive Officer for Local Mission. Tania started with a collection of separate entities, each passionate for their cause, and brought them together with a common purpose and shared values (and budgets).
 - Lisa Schmidt as Executive Director of Lutheran Education Australia. Lisa has joined wholeheartedly in the LCANZ's purpose and mission, and actively seeks ways that Lutheran schools can give expression to that.
 - Assistant Bishop Andrew Pfeiffer, whose dedication to our Lord Jesus and faithful support of the church are unparalleled.
 - Elected members of the General Church Board who served selflessly, sometimes at short notice: Charmaine Harch, Faye Schmidt, Mel Zerner, Tim Wiebusch, Peter Zweck, Paul Argyle and Tim Stringer
 - My fellow bishops who, with Andrew and I, form the College of Bishops: David Altus (SA-NT), Lester Priebbenow (Vic-Tas), Paul Smith & Mark Vainikka (Qld), Robert Bartholomaeus (NSW-ACT), Mark Whitfield (LCNZ), Michael Fulwood (WA).
- 104 I thank you, the delegates and members of the LCANZ, for the privilege to serve you as your bishop over the past three synodical terms. In 2013, when I stood for President, I did not imagine that you would change the title to 'bishop' at that same convention. While it's only a name, with no change in duties, the title 'bishop' has never needed explaining in the way that 'president' did. People know who you are and what you are called to do. We must take care, however, that we retain the egalitarian nature of leadership in the LCANZ; no special class of bishops must develop among us.
- 105 God willing, I plan to retire from the active ministry at the end of 2021, after 39 years of service to the LCANZ. That time has spanned four districts and a wide variety of roles, both called and volunteer. I grew up on the move, with no particular place of origin, and my years of service in the LCANZ have continued that pattern. Now, I will just want to rest for a while and get to know the local community in which I now live and belong.
- 106 God bless the LCANZ and its new leadership, including our new bishop, whom we will elect during the online sessions in 2021, and who will lead us, God willing, during the in-person Convention sessions in 2022.

Respectfully submitted

PASTOR JOHN HENDERSON
Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand
Adelaide, 8 July 2021

CHURCHWIDE BISHOP'S OFFICE**FINANCE REPORT**

	2020	2019	2018
Income	0	2,047	2,000
Expenditure	(230,893)	(320,854)	(356,393)
Grants allocated for year	105,329	93,164	127,921
Non cash transfers	(197)	(14,744)	(315)
Net result for year	<u>(125,761)</u>	<u>(240,387)</u>	<u>(226,787)</u>
Allocation against LCA Accumulated Funds	<u>(125,761)</u>	<u>(240,387)</u>	<u>(226,787)</u>
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