

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND BISHOP'S REPORT TO THE SOUTH AUSTRALIA-NORTHERN TERRITORY DISTRICT 2024

Sisters and brothers in Christ, I greet you with the prayerful encouragement of St Paul to the Christians in the ancient city of Philippi:

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ... And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:3-6,9-11)

I thank God for your witness and service in the mission of God in the communities of the South Australia and Northern Territory District of our church.

It has been a joy for me to enter into a new collegiality with Bishop Andrew Brook. It is a special advantage for the SANT District, that the LCANZ Bishop's office is "just up the road". Bishop Andrew and I have been able to meet face to face variously and also to serve together in rites of the Church, such as ordinations. We have also found much in common such as our common studies at the University of Adelaide and our shared interest in the theology of, and community expression of Lutheran Worship. Please continue to pray for Bishop Andrew, his wife Jodie and their family as Bishop Andrew service serves as the bishop for this largest district of the LCANZ.

1. LOOKING FORWARD: "THE GIFT OF GOD - It's grace that unites us!"

This is the theme our Convention of General Synod to be held at Concordia College, Highgate in Adelaide, during October 2024. The theme draws on St Paul's celebration of God's grace and mercy in Ephesians 2:8-10: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."*

The doctrinal foundation of this theme is the grace of God at work in our baptism into Christ. Throughout his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle uses the shorthand "in Christ" to declare our status as "heirs" who have died with Christ in the waters of baptism, and raised with him to "walk in newness of life".

In chapter 4 of Ephesians, St Paul encourages the Christians in Ephesus to live out the grace of God given in our baptism into Christ. He writes, *"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."*

As we walk together as people of the Lutheran Church in New Zealand and Australia in 2024, this Scripture with the Synod theme asks us to see each other "In Christ." We gather as sisters and brothers united by our one Lord in the one faith with one baptism. I once heard a sermon that summarised this truth by suggesting "water is thicker than blood". The preacher explained that the unity given by God's grace in our common baptism is stronger than any social, family or organisational unity.

2. MISSION RESEARCH DATA:

At its July meeting last year, our General Church Board (GCB) focused on mission life in the Lutheran Church in Australia and New Zealand. This included data from the Districts of the church via the District Bishops and material presented by Dr Tania Nelson from Local Mission. Of course, the mission of the church is the primary ongoing focus for GCB but the Board has resolved to ensure that each year, it will specifically work through data of the communities of the LCANZ at one GCB meeting. Historically there had been formal "statistician's reports" to the Church, but the last of these was in the 1990s.

The kind of material that was before GCB is available to the congregations and communities of the church through the Mission Directors. We use data to observe and orient ourselves in the context where the Lord has placed us as his servant church. This enables us to make considered decisions of how and where to grow new missional communities in the cause of the Gospel.

In more recent times, particularly in Australia, the various Christian denominations have worked more closely together in analysing mission research data through the materials produced by the National Church Life survey. Please seek out your region's mission data through your District Office. More general resources are available on the NCLS Website: <https://www.ncls.org.au/>

3. 2024 ORDINATION WAY FORWARD:

Across our Church there are pastors and lay people working together to help prepare delegates for the work on ordination that will be presented at the Convention of General Synod. This work, called as the Way Forward Project, is the charter that was given to the General Church Board (GCB) and to the College of Bishops (COB) by the Melbourne Convention. I have reprinted the Synod Resolution as an appendix to this report for you to reread.

As we travel forward to Synod 2024, I commend to you some key matters regarding who we are and how we express ourselves as Lutheran Christians in Australia and New Zealand. I have summarised these key matters in four brief papers as appendices at the end of this report. They are in a "Question and Answer" format on the topics:

Can a Christian believe the Bible is the Word of God and support the ordination of women?

Am I a Confessional Lutheran?

What does our Church mean when it teaches that the "Bible is the Word of God."?

Don't Churches that allow the ordination of women also practice same-sex marriage?

In summary, in this Way Forward Project, we are affirming:

- a. We are firstly sisters and brothers in Christ, we are not opponents in battle.*
- b. We are a Lutheran Confessional Church community that is faithful to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions.*
- c. We are undertaking the work given to us by a resolution of the Church in Convention of General Synod.*
- d. We are like other overseas Lutheran Churches in some ways but in many ways we are quite different from some overseas Lutheran Churches.*

4. MINISTRY FUTURES PROJECT:

I am grateful for the ongoing work undertaken by Bishop Emeritus Greg Pietsch for the church in this project established by the College of Bishops.

Towards the end of 2023, Bishop Emeritus Greg provided the College of Bishops with a comprehensive update of the project and of key matters in preparation for final reporting for

the Convention of General Synod 2024. He has consulted widely across the leaders and communities of the church, with the focus on “regionalisation” and “pathways”.

His reporting has highlighted matters such as *“local lay people needing basic training and formation in particular ministry areas increasingly without a local pastor being present to provide it, as in the past; fewer trained lay workers are employed at the local level; church agencies have a diversity of vocational training needs specific to their service area; ALC is progressively adjusting its ministry learning offerings to meet the changing context; the church might consider establishing a ‘Training and Accreditation body’.”*

Bishop Emeritus Greg has now submitted his final report and I will be able to bring further information to the convention.

5. INDIGENOUS FIRST NATION MATTERS:

In 2023, the Federal Government conducted a referendum asking Australians if they approved a proposed alteration to the Australian Constitution “to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.”

The Referendum outcome was to not approve the alteration.

In the lead up to the referendum, the College of Bishops worked with our Assistant to the Bishop - Public Theology Nick Schwarz to provide the communities of our church with a guide to the matters in the referendum, without supporting either the “Yes” or the “No” campaigns. We also included material from three Australian Aboriginal Lutheran Leaders, Noel Pearson, Shona Reid and Andrea Mason; and material from the Hopevale Lutheran Community in Far North Queensland.

Various people in the church used this material in their deliberations in the matter, either privately or in small groups, before the referendum.

With the referendum question resulting in the decision to maintain the status quo, we have opportunity to take up work of the Reconciliation Action Plan placed before us through the 2018 Convention of General Synod: <https://www.rap.lca.org.au/>

6. AUSTRALIAN LUTHERAN COLLEGE AND PRINCIPAL:

During December 2023, we farewelled Pastor James Winderlich from his service as Principal at our Australian Lutheran College (ALC). James had accepted his call to St John's Lutheran Church in Southgate, Melbourne. We also farewelled Dr Stephen Haar who finished his service as Lecturer and Vice Principal. Over the 12 months leading up to the end of 2023, a variety of lay and ordained staff also finished their service amongst us.

On 18 February, Dr Tim Stringer was installed as our new ALC Principal. Tim has now finished his service as the parish pastor in the Greensborough Thomastown Parish in the northern parts of Melbourne. He recently completed his Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching in 2020. You can find more about Tim on the ALC Website: <https://alc.edu.au/about/alc-staff/view/tim-stringer/>

In 2023, two men graduated from the Pastoral Ministry Stream at ALC and were ordained as pastors: Pastor Jacob Fabich and Pastor Tom Kitson. We also continue with an increasing number of ordinations of Specific Ministry Pastors, but we must pray to the “Lord of the Harvest” to gather workers.

As we pray, I ask you to encourage people to consider enrolling in the various training opportunities at ALC.

7. INTERNATIONAL MISSION COLLABORATION

Pastor Matt Anker and Erin Kerber continue to serve the church in the extraordinary world of International Mission Partnerships. They maintain a very helpful website informing the church of the work of LCAIM at: <https://lcamission.org.au/>

In August 2023, we were privileged to host 11 ephorus (bishops) of the Indonesian Lutheran Churches. These Christian leaders oversee approximately 7 million Lutheran members. The 11 church leaders met with our College of Bishops, particularly to discuss how we might better collaborate as partners and neighbours in the cause of the Gospel of our Lord. One key focus in that conversation was how congregations can engage with their young people.

We continue to work closely with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea which serves with somewhere between 1 and 2 million Lutheran members. A number of our LCANZ folk still serve in PNG, including Pastor Murray and Tracy Smith, Pastor Mick and Milka Hauser and their family, and Hanna Schulz.

With significant increases in migration in Australia, a future synergy between International Mission and the communities of the LCANZ regards language or national Lutheran groups involved in the mission and ministry of our Church. This is a matter of Interchurch relations and of mission collaboration.

8. LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

In September 2023, I was privileged to attend the Lutheran World Federation's General Assembly in Krakow in Poland. At the end of this report, I have included my reporting on the Assembly which I tabled at our General Church Board last November.

We are currently an Associate Member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). At the Convention of General Synod in October this year, we will have before us, a proposal to become full members of both the LWF and the International Lutheran Council (ILC). (This was a proposal also before us at the 2023 Convention of General Synod in Melbourne but we were unable to take it up due to time constraints.)

In my report to the 2023 Convention, I gave a detailed account of the background and key matters in the proposal to become a full member of the LWF.

9. INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

Last year, the ILC celebrated its 30th year. In acknowledgement of this milestone, the Board of Directors of the ILC published a statement which I have included for you amongst the appendices to this report. You can read other ILC materials on the website: <https://ilc-online.org/>

In the statement, the churches involved in the ILC (and the LCANZ is an Associate Member) were reminded of the doctrinal position of the ILC regarding ordination. As we prepare for the Convention of General Synod in October 2024 this is a significant matter. The clause from the statement quotes the Bylaws of the ILC:

“Concerning the Office of the Ministry, we believe that while “all Christians—men and women—are redeemed and able to serve the Church in many ways, Holy Scripture requires that only men who are spiritually qualified in life and doctrine are to be called and ordained as pastors to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments” (Bylaws II, D, 2, b).”

10. SCHOOLS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Across the Districts of the Church, we continue to maintain 78 schools and 58 early childhood centres, touching the lives of over 44,000 young people along with their families in our

schools and over 4,000 in our early childhood centres. This is an extraordinary service that we bring to Australia people.

I thank our gracious God for the gift of the staff in our schools, in particular the faithful Christian leadership of our Lutheran principals and for their school Council members.

These communities include worship and the teaching of the gospel amidst programmes of quality Christian education to help young people flourish before God.

Since the policy of the Church requires that our principals are Lutheran by their confession we are facing a major challenge that we do not have the same kind of quantity of potential Lutheran principal leaders for our Schools that we had in the 1980s and 1990s when we saw the significant increase in the number and size of Lutheran Schools in Australia.

The Board for Lutheran Education Australia (BLEA) continues to provide strong leadership development programmes but we also need appropriately skilled women and men of the Church to offer their gifts in service as leaders for our Schools.

11. CARE MINISTRIES

In our church we maintain quite a diversity of models of institutional care services, including aged care, disability care, youth and family services governed regionally by District, congregational or other collaborative Lutheran structures. These group participate in networking forums to build up each other and to share resources. The LCA has no governing authority for this work.

12. YOUR CHURCHWIDE OFFICE

In November 2023, our Executive Officer, Brett Hausler, notified the Church of changes to staffing for our Churchwide Office in North Adelaide.

To restructure the office team to maintain ongoing budgeting means that a number of staff have not had their contracts extended. This has followed a process of not replacing some staff who left for various reasons.

In the eNews, Brett Hausler explained that the focus of these changes is to address the ongoing annual budget deficit of \$1.5 million and to find best ways to maintain services that are "critical for congregations and church agencies." This includes seeking a closer collaboration between District and Churchwide offices with a project-based approach rather than maintaining departments.

This has not been an easy journey for our Office and our staff. Brett and his team have sought to diligently provide support and options for staff impacted by these changes.

13. NORTH ADELAIDE PROPERTIES

At the end of November in 2023, the GCB sent an ENews to inform the communities of our church that at the November GCB meeting, it was resolved to place the LCA's North Adelaide properties on the market. This includes the Churchwide office on 197 Archer Street and the ALC campus.

In the mail out, Brett Hausler explained that the cost of maintaining the ALC site alone is approximately \$400 000 per year with a number of the buildings unoccupied. In the 1980s, the ALC campus included some 200 students, predominantly young adults, studying for vocations, mostly for Churchwork. In the past decade the campus has changed with few students on campus.

These changes in the form of the ALC community and the change in the ALC programme delivery is a catalyst for seeking to serve the church better in maintaining the institution of ALC.

Similarly, our Churchwide Office was originally a residence for people who are sight impaired. Placing the Office and ALC together on the market is capturing the opportunity to develop options that is better designed for the church's needs.

Brett Hausler reported that GCB commissioned research into matters such "as reviewing the heritage and planning requirements such as listed buildings and significant trees; clarifying the needs of local council and heritage bodies; obtaining subdivision approval for the existing land to provide flexibility for redevelopment or its sale; and exploring buildings around Adelaide for possible relocation if this is required." This has helped inform the approach.

13. THE COLLEGE OF BISHOPS (CoB)

The College of Bishops continues to collaborate for many matters the church. In the past year, we have seen a significant increase in the number of ordinations of Specific Ministry Pastors across the Districts of the Church, so SMP candidacy has been a regular agenda item at CoB meetings.

In 2023, CoB welcomed two new bishops: WA District Bishop Peter Hage and SANT District Bishop Andrew Brook. In the same year, we farewelled Bishop Emeritus Mike Fullwood (WA); Bishop Emeritus David Altus (SANT) and Bishop Emeritus Mark Whitfield (LCNZ).

Also in 2023, the Lutheran Church in New Zealand (LCNZ) deferred its election of a new LCNZ bishop until 2025. In the interim, the LCNZ had negotiated with the NSWACT District to receive the oversight of the NSWACT Bishop for the affairs of the LCNZ. This temporary relationship was established after diligent investigation into the constitutional requirements for the Bishop's role in the LCNZ. We thank God for the willingness of Bishop Robert Bartholomaeus of the NSWACT District to take up the extra duties.

At the 2024 NSWACT Convention, Pastor Richard Schwedes was elected to serve as the District's next bishop.

In 2023, following the Convention of General Synod, the CoB has met on a monthly basis with the GCB, to transact the Synod resolution regarding a framework for the Church that addresses the matter of ordination of both women and men.

The duties set down for College of Bishops asks the bishops to:

- (a) give special attention to the doctrine, worship and life of the Church;*
- (b) support the Churchwide Bishop in the Bishop's role as the spiritual leader of the Church;*
- (c) encourage the Church to be active in Christ's mission and to strive for unity, harmony and good order in the Church;*
- (d) study developments and trends in church and society and give guidance to the pastors and members of the Church accordingly;*
- (e) care for the pastors of the Church and have oversight of their ministry;*
- (f) give leadership in the resolution of conflict in the Church;*
- (g) advise the General Church Board and any District Church Council/Board on matters pertaining to the Church and its ministry;*

- (h) have oversight of, and report to the General Church Board on the work of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, the Commission on Worship and the Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions;*
- (i) assign, in consultation with the teaching staff, the pastor graduates of Australian Lutheran College and other pastors as the need arises; and*
- (j) give pastoral support, care and counsel to each other.*

14. OUR HERITAGE OF MISSION

When people consider who was the first Lutheran pastor to arrive in Australia, they commonly think of Pastor August Kavel who arrived with his congregation in 1838 at Port Adelaide.

But there were other Lutheran pastors and missionaries serving in Australia before Pastor Kavel arrived. One of these was preceded Pastor Kavel in South Australia and this pastor is a tremendous witness for us as we continue to describe who we are and what we do as Lutherans in New Zealand and Australia.

On the 12th of October, 1838 two other Lutheran Pastors arrived in South Australia with a charter to evangelise the indigenous Kurna peoples of the Adelaide plains. These were Pastors Teichelmann and Schürmann. Pastor Teichelmann's history is a good story of struggle; of apparent human failure; but also of God's guiding hand and of surprising outcomes beyond what we could ever hope for or think of.

Christian Gottlob Teichelmann studied for five years at a Mission College in Germany learning the key Biblical languages of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He also studied English, world and church history, geography and preaching. Pastor Teichelmann then did further studies at another Theological Mission College for nearly three more years. This was to equip him in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, so that as a missionary, he could translate the Scriptures into the language of indigenous people.

When he arrived in South Australia, that is exactly what Pastor Teichelmann did as he and his colleague Pastor Schurmann began pioneer language work with the Kurna peoples. But funding and support from Europe and from local Lutherans was a problem. Despite this, Pastor Teichelmann persisted in the work to bring the things of God to people who did not know the grace of God in the cross of Christ.

With this focus, Pastor Teichelmann also got in trouble with the state authorities in South Australia. He would regularly criticise the state for trying to make the indigenous peoples into Europeans. He was especially worried about the destruction of indigenous communities and the loss of their languages. He knew that these were the means for people to be strong together, but more so, the languages were the means by which the indigenous peoples would best learn of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In contrast to the opinions of many of the other Europeans in Australia at the time, Pastor Teichelmann knew the Kurna people were loved by their Creator and that they were people for whom Christ had died, who needed to learn of God's love for them. Right up to his retirement in 1874, he continued to advocate for respectful engagement with indigenous peoples and served on the Killalpaninna Mission Board.

Struggling with financial hardship and isolation and having to deal with the close of the mission with the Kurna people, Pastor Teichelmann could not have imagined that his language and translation work with Pastor Schurmann in the 1840s, would be the means in the 21st century, for a whole new generation of Kurna people to cultivate their language and their identity.

Pastor Teichelmann gives us a tremendous legacy of Lutheran witness and service, as we set our mind on the things of God trusting that our gracious God will lead us on the way of the cross, to God's glory and for the blessing of the people we serve.

May the Lord of the cross and empty grave keep us in the grace of our baptism, that we would walk by faith as people of hope.

15. PERSONAL

Let me end with some brief notes to keep you up to date with some of the personal story of the LCANZ Bishop. My wife Heidi and I travelled through an extraordinary 12 months of family events.

It began in January 2023 when our youngest son Jeremy, having been recently ordained by the bishop of the church, entered his first parish ministry as an LCANZ pastor in the South Australian town of Kadina. Jeremy and his wife Katie moved to their new home in January and have had a wonderful year with God's people there.

In May, our daughter, Felicity gave birth to our first grandchild, Amelia who was later baptised by "Uncle Jeremy" at St Peters Lutheran Church, Indooroopilly (a vacancy at the time). Amelia ('Millie') and her mother and father (Nathan) are all going well.

In early October, our oldest child, Benjamin married his fiancé, Kezia. Ben manages the kitchen at the Lutheran Church's Trinder Park Aged Care community in Brisbane's southside.

Just prior to Ben and Kezia's wedding, as Heidi and I were travelling back from the LWF Assembly in Poland, I received the sad news that my mother had died after a brief illness. Maureen Slocum's funeral was held in my hometown of Atherton, Far North Queensland, ten days before the wedding.

Heidi and I are both in good health but regrettably since my second bout of COVID19 in April 2023, I have suffered from persistent and loud tinnitus in both my ears. My doctor has advised that it is something that probably can't be "cured".

*"To me the preaching of the cross
Is wisdom everlasting;
Thy death, O Lord, redeems my loss;
On Thee my burden casting,
I in Thy name
A refuge claim
From sin and ills distressing:
To Thee be praise and blessing."*

(LHS 162 'In Jesus I find peace and rest' Unknown Danish Author 1740)

Pastor Paul Smith
Bishop, Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand
Adelaide,
Easter 2024

APPENDIX 1: Bishop Paul's Four Documents

Can a Christian believe the Bible is the Word of God and support the ordination of women?

In recent times, there have been some who have argued that a person who believes that the Bible is the Word of God, cannot support the ordination of both women and men as pastors.

It is common for Christian people who support the ordination of both women and men, to base this teaching entirely on their study of the Bible.

At the end of the 20th century, Biblical scholars of our Lutheran Church in Australia and New Zealand gathered to consider the teaching of the Scriptures regarding the ordination of both women and men. Their conclusions, published in 1999, were that the Scriptures did not exclude women from being ordained as pastors.

A key matter in any study of the Scriptures on the ordination of both women and men, is the development of Christian teaching based on Bible passages such as 1st Timothy chapter 2 and 1st Corinthians chapter 14. These two particular Scriptures are used to argue that only men can be ordained as pastors and are quoted in the LCANZ Theses of Agreement as the teaching of our Church regarding who can be ordained.

The use of these Scripture passages has changed throughout the history of Christianity. From the time of the early Church, these passages were used to teach that women cannot be involved in leadership and other public activity in the Church, such as voting at meetings. In the history of the Christian Church, these Bible passages have also been used to teach that women cannot speak, sing or pray out loud in Church or in home gatherings of Christians.

A Christian who believes that both women and men can be ordained as pastors, is saying that these Bible passages are not as clear as some claim them to be, and so the passages should not be used to exclude women from serving as pastors of the Church.

Bishop Paul Smith
On the Festival of the Epiphany, 2024

Am I a “Confessional Lutheran”?

In recent times, some Lutherans have used the word “confessional” to divide Christians of Lutheran Churches into different groups. One group is called the “Confessional Lutherans”. The word “Confessional” is used here to suggest that one particular group properly upholds the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord. The intention is to suggest that other Lutherans do not properly uphold the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions.

Is this the way that we should use the word “Confessional” in our Lutheran Church in Australia and New Zealand?

In 1952, our New Zealand and Australian Lutheran Church theologians determined how we should describe ourselves as people of the Lutheran Confession. Their work became “Article Nine” of the Theses of Agreement which were adopted as our Church’s teaching at the foundation of the LCA NZ in 1966. Article Nine gives some good basic principles for explaining what it means to be a “Lutheran” Christian.

1. Their fundamental principle taught that a person who is a Lutheran needs no “adjective” like “confessional” to describe their Christian witness. Either a person is a Lutheran Christian, or they are not.
2. Their next principle was to identify all the writings in the Book of Concord of 1580 as the “Lutheran Confessions”. Being a Lutheran means that you subscribe to the teachings of the Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord.
3. Their third principle was to discern how different Lutherans know and understand the various writings in the Book of Concord. Some Lutheran Churches do not have all the writings of the Book of Concord but they are still Lutheran Churches. Some Lutheran Christians have not studied all the books of the Book of Concord but these people are still Lutherans. For example, a young person might only know the Small Catechism from their confirmation but we still identify that person as a “confirmed Lutheran”.
4. Their final principle was to acknowledge that a Lutheran Church or a Lutheran person who did not know or understand the various writings in the Book of Concord should not deny any of the teachings of the Lutheran Church which are in the writings that they don’t know or understand. This is really the same as the first principle. As long as a person upholds the teachings of the Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord, they are a Lutheran.

All the people of our Lutheran Church in New Zealand and Australia can therefore be described as “Confessional Lutherans” but it is better to simply describe them as “Lutheran”.

Bishop Paul Smith
On the Festival of the Epiphany, 2024

What does our Church mean when it teaches that the “Bible is the Word of God.”?

In our Lutheran Church, we teach that some things in the Scriptures are “hard to understand” or that they are not “clear”. At the same time, we believe and teach that the Bible is the “Word of God.” When our Church was founded in 1966, our theological teachers summarized what we mean when we say that the Bible is the “Word of God.”. They described two ways, called the “formal” principle and the “material” principle.

Firstly, the expression “formal principle” means that we believe that the Bible was inspired by God. 2nd Timothy 3:16 tells us, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." As we read or hear the words of the Bible, we are receiving words from God.

Secondly, the expression “material principle” means that the Bible teaches us the Gospel of Christ as our Saviour and Lord. Martin Luther explained that the Bible was a manger in which Christ is laid. In John’s Gospel we hear our Lord Jesus saying, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” (John 5:39)

So, the Bible in my hands is God’s word to me, speaking “Christ” to me.

Sometimes people play these two principles off against one another saying one is more important, or that a proper Christian would be in favour of one more than the other.

The founding teachers of our Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand gave clear teaching on this matter, when they wrote, “We believe that the formal and the material principles must not be brought into opposition to each other, for the Scriptures are the Word of Christ and they testify of Him. Loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His Word, and loyalty to the Scriptures requires loyalty to Christ, His person, His work, His means of grace.” (Theses of Agreement 1:5)

At the opening of our Church conventions, either for a District of the Church or of the General Synod, the delegates make their confession of faith, regarding the Scriptures. The Bishop asks the delegates, “Do you accept the holy Scriptures as the word of God?” and everyone replies, “*We accept, without reservation, the holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life.*”

Bishop Paul Smith
On the Festival of the Epiphany, 2024

Don't Churches that allow the ordination of women also practice same-sex marriage?

It is true that some Churches around the world that ordain women also practice same sex marriages. It is not right, however, to then make the general statement that the ordination of women and same sex marriage are always linked. Examples from Lutheran Churches around the world show that the two matters should not be linked by such general statement.

Lutheran Churches in neighbouring Indonesia allow the ordination of both women and men but do not allow same sex marriage. This is not simply a "cultural" matter for the Indonesian Christians. In the United States of America, the North American Lutheran Church allows the ordination of both women and men but does not practice same-sex marriage. These Lutheran Churches have studied the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions to teach these things.

Our Convention of General Synod asked the Church to consider the matter of ordination of both women and men amongst us. The Convention did not ask the Church to address the matter of sexuality and same-sex marriage.

It is not correct or helpful to make general statements to suggest that a Church which allows the ordination of women is therefore going to promote same sex issues.

Bishop Paul Smith
On the Festival of the Epiphany, 2024

APPENDIX 2: Bishop Paul's Report on the Lutheran World Federation General Assembly 2023

LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION: General Assembly Krakow, Poland. September 13-19, 2023:

Our Lutheran Church in New Zealand and Australia has benefited richly by the variety of participants that we send to the LWF General Assembly. I was greatly encouraged and inspired by my participation as Bishop of our Church, although on the third day of the Assembly, I became ill with a kind of flu which also impacted on a significant number of delegates.

Those attending from the LCA included:

Delegates: Anita Synott and myself as LCA Bishop.

Guests: Michael Stolz from ALWS; Associate Professor Lisa Schmidt from LEA; Pastor Matt Anker from International Mission; Elsa Matthias from LWF Youth Forum and LCA International Mission. Heidi Smith (Bishop's wife).

The Assembly included the 150 member churches, (and two associate member churches which includes the LCA) as well as ten recognized churches and congregations, and two recognized councils. This represents over 77 million Christians in the Lutheran tradition in 99 countries across the globe.

The Assembly met in Krakow, Poland, from the 13th to the 19th of September in a programme which included worship and study, plenum discussion and presentations. The wider programme included "Pre-Assemblies" in the regions of the world, as well as women's, men's and youth pre-assembly events. The programme of the Assembly also included a day visit to the nearby Auschwitz Concentration camp historic precinct.

By the conclusion of business, the Assembly had issued Public Statements on:

Christian Presence and Life in the Holy Land

Religious and Ethnic Minorities in Asia

Tax Justice

The War Against Ukraine

The Assembly made **resolutions** as follows:

Affirming the continuation of work interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic

Strengthening theological education

Study processes in theology

Inclusivity and participation

Intergenerational Justice Policy

Gender justice in polarised times

Gender Based Violence

Reaffirming the youth quota

Reaffirming the lay quota

The rights of persons with disabilities

Indigenous peoples

Jewish-Christian Relations

Affirming humanitarian response on behalf of those affected by disasters in Libya, Morocco and other humanitarian crises

Climate emergency

Serving with people on the move

The Church in the public space

Strengthening ecumenical commitment and ecumenical commemoration of 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession

On the last day of the Assembly, the LCANZ Australians attending, met identified some key elements for the future of the LCANZ and our associate membership in the LWF. (*less BLEA Director Associate Professor Lisa Schmidt who had to leave to join her next group in Germany*). These key elements were:

- + Lutherans need to connect globally – including Australian Lutherans connecting outwards and other Lutherans connecting with us.
- + We should not treat participation in the LWF Assembly as a “once off” connection but as an expression of ongoing deepening partnerships around the world, especially in our region.
- + It is difficult to fully and properly participate as an “Associate Member” although most Churches relate to us as if we were full members. (we were not able to be involved in some sessions on account of being only associate members)
- + We must move from good internal connections to stronger global connections.
- + LCANZ and LWF must engage in better “two way” comms. The LCANZ needs to make LWF comms in the LCANZ better.

You can review the Assembly content further at: <https://2023.lwfassembly.org/>

The LWF Assembly Message 2023

Preamble

As delegates to the Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we gathered in Kraków, Poland, from 13 to 19 September 2023, to worship, reflect, discuss, and discern the way forward for our global communion of churches, inspired by the theme of “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope” (Ephesians 4:4).

Before we came here, we gathered in our regions and we gathered in Poland, as youth, women, and for the first time as men, for our Pre-Assemblies.

We are deeply grateful to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, its leaders, congregations, and volunteers, for their generous hospitality. A minority church in the country, witnessing in an often-challenging context, the Polish Lutheran church has truly shown us that every church has gifts to share with the rest of the communion.

Together we affirm that we are One in the Body of Christ, empowered by the One Spirit and called to proclaim the One Hope of the Risen Christ.

During this Assembly, we were reminded of the urgency of providing a coherent, credible, and united witness to the gospel amid the many crises which afflict our polarized and fragmented world today.

Looking ahead to the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030, we remember the call of the reformers of the sixteenth century, recalled by our keynote speaker, to be “an ever-reforming church,” working for Christian unity, but also striving to unite into One Body all of humanity, together with all of creation, as we witness to the gospel in words and actions.

One Body

In worship, we reflected on the incarnation, when God became a baby in a manger, a vulnerable body of flesh and blood. The incarnation challenges us to recognize God in every person and in all of creation, acknowledging our deep-down unity.

But we live in a divided world, where bodies are hurting, rejected, excluded, and the earth, our shared home, is suffering from the effects of growing environmental and climate emergencies.

The relentless rise in global temperatures, with this year, already now ranking as the hottest on record, has meant loss of biodiversity, lives, livelihoods, and whole communities. We hear and acknowledge the urgent call to action. We are a part of God's creation. Led by young people, we pledge to be more effective advocates for economic and climate justice, safeguarding the planet and its resources for future generations. Together we reaffirm that creation is not for sale.

We gathered in a region where Russia's war against Ukraine has left hundreds of thousands dead and injured, with millions more displaced by the fighting. Across the globe, we hear the cries of bodies maimed, killed or displaced by war and conflict. We remember Ethiopia, Haiti, Manipur, Myanmar, Nigeria, Palestine, Sudan, Venezuela, Yemen, and many other places where violence claims lives and disrupts whole communities. Our faith calls us to be messengers of justice, peace and reconciliation, standing alongside those who are most vulnerable.

This year has seen the highest number of **refugees** and internally displaced people, with official figures surpassing 108 million. Our faith calls us to welcome the stranger and we are grateful to those who offer shelter and support, recalling Christ's words, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35).

We reject all forms of **violence and discrimination** based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, age, disability, xenophobia, caste, or social background. All people are created in the image of God, with equal dignity that cannot be compromised.

On the tenth anniversary of the LWF **Gender Justice** Policy, we celebrate the progress we have made and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the empowerment of women and to an end to sexual and gender-based violence, which saw a sharp increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. We call for stronger partnerships between women and men to combat patriarchy and we affirm an understanding of masculinity that is characterized by caring, nurturing, and serving.

We reiterate the call of the LWF, first made almost four decades ago, to affirm the full participation of women in the ordained ministry. There should be no distinction between the ordained ministry of women and men.

We are crying with **women** who are still denied their equal dignity and suffer oppression on racial, cultural or religious pretexts. We call for theological reflection and education around gender justice and the continuous empowerment of women and girls, ensuring that they can enjoy a future that is fair and just and full of opportunities.

We are stronger because of diverse participation in the life of the communion. We commit ourselves to working for increased **intergenerational justice**. While some progress has been made, we do not take this for granted. We must do better to ensure meaningful participation of youth in all areas of church life, including governance and decision-making.

We are called to recognize Christ in one another, and to combat **dehumanizing hate speech** that leads to harmful actions against individuals or communities. We are all united in the body of Christ and we know that when one part of the body hurts, the whole body suffers. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

Just as our faith compels us to care for the physical well-being of others, so we must also prioritize mental, spiritual, and emotional health. As a global faith community, we are called to combat stigma and isolation, creating spaces of acceptance, accessibility and inclusion to which people can turn in times of need. We have observed an increase in mental health concerns, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing climate emergency, as well as violence, discrimination, and polarization. This requires urgent practical action, alongside theological reflection. The LWF is a communion of churches proclaiming the gospel in different ways, across all seasons, cultures, economies, and political contexts, as we seek to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We celebrate the gift of unity in diversity, knowing that the center is always Christ.

Our member churches differ significantly between countries and regions. **Mutual accountability** is a mark of the church as we seek to share one another's burdens. Through conversation we discern what it means to be the One Body of Christ in 99 countries and be enriched by our diversity. We need each other's experiences, insights, and critique. We are reminded and encouraged by Christ who holds all things together (Colossians 1:17).

The LWF is confessional communion, but it is not an inward-looking confessionalist body. Since its foundation, working for Christian unity has been one of LWF's core tasks. We see ourselves as part of the broad ecumenical movement, with close connections to our partners and a shared commitment to heed Christ's call "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical. The Lord calls us to recognize that the church is One Body in Christ in humility. We have been engaged in fruitful ecumenical dialogues for decades and we seek for deeper and wider understanding among all Christians.

We are well aware of the disagreements and divisions that have torn Christian churches apart over the centuries and continue to cause tensions in our own churches, within our global Lutheran communion and among Christians worldwide. But we also know that there is more that unites us than separates us, and we pledge to walk forward together.

One Spirit

In worship we confessed our broken hearts and prayed that God create in us a clean heart. We heard the promise that God's Spirit has renewed and reconciled us, moving and inspiring us to live the closeness to God already present, and closer to one another.

We live in a world of increasing polarization **where misleading theologies** create exclusive or escapist communities, accumulating power and wealth in the hands of a few, while sowing fear and fragmentation within churches and communities. We acknowledged that to overcome this, we need to ground our teaching and preaching on responsible theologies, as a global communion and in the member churches.

Responsible theology is grounded in the Bible. It heals wounds, creates unity, and strengthens communion. Responsible theology is holistic, uses inclusive language and diverse and accessible means of communication. Responsible theology builds inclusive communities, daring to renew its language and ways of reaching out to people on the margins. Responsible theology gives space for the renewing and reforming power of the One Spirit.

We underline the importance **of stronger theological education** and leadership formation for the sustainability of our churches, equipping people to engage with complex issues without resorting to simplistic answers.

Constructive interfaith engagement should be a special focus of theological education, both through high-level **dialogue**, as well as emphasizing the importance of harmonious daily life encounters with people of other faiths. We are committed to being good neighbors in religiously diverse societies.

At the 1984 Assembly in Budapest, the LWF repudiated Martin Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews, declaring antisemitism a contradiction and affront to the Gospel. We reaffirm that and express our continued commitment to live out our Lutheran heritage in the Christian faith with love and respect for the Jewish people.

As a communion of churches, we are called to discern the One Spirit from the many spirits of our time (1 Cor 12:10) in order to explore what the Triune God is calling us to do in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages. As we unite in prayer and common worship, in joint studies of Scripture and the Lutheran confessional writings, we discern and act upon God's divine calling in our world today.

We walked through the camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau.
They were transported as cattle and sent to die.
We went there to face the truth.
They were lied to, humiliated and murdered.
We lamented.

Walking through Auschwitz-Birkenau.
We remembered also other places of unspeakable evil.
We remember that there is one humanity.
That all have the same dignity given by God.
We pledge never to be indifferent.
We pledge to stand against hate speech, lies, atrocities.
We pray, never again.

The Assembly theme reminds us that Body and Spirit belong together, urging us to speak out against all forms of oppression, spiritual and physical. We are called to combat the racism, violence, abuse, inequality and exploitation that are still found in both church and society today.

In some parts of the world, churches suffer from restrictive laws or government policies, limiting their freedom of speech and even subjecting them to persecution if they raise their voices on behalf of justice and human rights. We deplore the discrimination and oppression of our Christian sisters and brothers, wherever it takes place and regardless of their faith or denomination. We ask member churches to pray for them and urge the communion to address this problem.

One Hope

In worship, we remembered that we are one human family and though the storms are rough, Christ is in the boat with us.

Faced with intersecting crises and a push-back on hard-won human rights, we may feel that the challenges ahead of us are overwhelming and insurmountable. During this assembly, we have heard the Risen Christ telling us, "Do not be afraid!"

The One Spirit shows us that another world is possible. The gospel invites us to hope, learning to read the signs of God's promise everywhere in the world because our hope is built upon Jesus Christ.

As Lutherans, we participate in God's holistic mission: proclamation, advocacy, diakonia, at international level, as well as locally in our individual churches. We are called through baptism and sent out to proclaim the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. The Spirit calls us to be instruments of justice, peace and reconciliation, healing wounds within our churches and in our common world. Equipped by the Holy Spirit, we are encouraged to build communities of hope wherever the gospel is shared and lived across the globe.

When we speak about hope, we must not be confused by worldly prospects, by false hopes and desires, but must remain focused on a concrete hope for this world and the next. We affirm that it is hope that holds the LWF together as a communion. It inspires us to stand in solidarity with each other, while addressing together the rapid changes and challenges our world is facing.

Hope reminds us that we are one humanity, with no distinction between us. In the waters of baptism, we become aware of the vast communion of saints with us and around us. It is a place of hope, and we give thanks to God for all those who have walked the road of reconciliation before us.

As we reflect on our work as churches in communion, we must find new ways of offering hope to all people. Not an empty hope, but bold hope that is inspired by our faith in God and followed by our actions to serve people who are poor, in need, migrants, refugees and those affected by crises. Hope empowers us to speak out in the public space for justice and human rights. This hope must manifest itself in more tangible ways in the church through its work, worship, and mission.

As Lutherans we are churches in ongoing reformation. In Christ, we experience the joys and sufferings in this world and we are called to name and respond to the challenges within the LWF communion and the world around us. We commit ourselves to learn from our past.

Diakonia is hope in action. We affirm the LWF's humanitarian and development work, its global engagement, its work with member churches, and partners, offering people in need hope and a future. Working together with people of all faiths, we seek to promote a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.

Growing awareness of the **human-made climate emergency** and actions to tackle it within our member churches are signs of hope. The LWF must continue to play a crucial role, connecting the work of local churches and communities to global advocacy.

Hope is the lens through which we look at the world, as followers of Christ, journeying together into the future.

Sent into the world

We return to our home countries with a deeper sense of what it means to be churches in communion and with a stronger commitment to strengthen the bonds between us. We walk together as churches in an ecclesial and confessing communion, witnessing to our faith, in God's holistic mission. We heed the call to live into the gift of reconciliation and unity with all neighbors.

As we journey towards 2030 and the 500th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, we rejoice in the ecumenical potential of our confession, which is a plea for unity, intended to hold the Body of Christ, the church, together.

As churches in ongoing reformation, we are called to work for peace in the world, between people, countries, and with the whole of creation.

As One Body, called by the One Spirit, in One Hope, we go from Kraków to all corners of the world, to proclaim the gospel that we are liberated by God's grace and sent to serve our neighbor.

APPENDIX 3: Anniversary Statement from the International Lutheran Council, 2023

Confessing the Faith with Intrepid Hearts

A Statement on the 30th Anniversary of the International Lutheran Council

Wittenberg, Germany

October 14, 2023

The International Lutheran Council (ILC) is a worldwide association of 58 confessional Lutheran churches in 52 countries which proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of an unconditional commitment to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God (*ILC Bylaws II, A, B*).

The modern origins of the International Lutheran Council can be traced back to delegates of confessional church bodies from Europe, North and South America, and Australia meeting in Uelzen, Germany in 1952, not long after World War II. Over the next forty years the 'International Lutheran Theological Conference,' as it was then called, organized many international gatherings of the heads of confessional Lutheran churches. The ILC as such came into existence on September 9, 1993, when 23 Lutheran church leaders from around the world adopted a constitution while gathered in Antigua, Guatemala. The theological origins of the ILC, however, are rooted in the confession of Martin Luther and the Lutheran fathers of the 16th century Reformation, including the courageous authors who concluded the Formula of Concord (XII:40) by stating:

In the sight of God and all Christendom, the entire Church of Christ, we want to testify to those now living and those who will come after us. This declaration...is our faith, doctrine, and confession. By God's grace, with intrepid hearts, we are willing to appear before the judgment seat of Christ with this Confession and give an account of it.

The 21st century members of the International Lutheran Council continue to be inspired by the *intrepid hearts*—the *fearless hearts*—of those 16th century confessors who signed the Formula of Concord. The same spirit is alive today as the ILC celebrates its 30th anniversary under the theme "Confessing the Faith with Intrepid Hearts."

The ILC remains committed in word and action to the confessional basis and purpose articulated in its Constitution (*Articles II and III*) and Bylaws (*Article II*). We expect churches of the ILC, and exhort churches not of the ILC, to retain, confess, and put into action the godly, wise, and beautiful way of life revealed in Holy Scripture. During these dark and later days, the world is being overwhelmed by a culture of ugliness and death which is increasingly promoted and enforced by civil authorities, even in opposition to freedom of religion and religious speech. Therefore, the ILC must continue to embrace and fearlessly proclaim God the Father's biblical pattern of holiness, truth, and beauty which is enlivened by the atoning forgiveness of Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word, and the administration of Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of Jesus' Body and Blood.

Thus, at this anniversary we re-affirm: "The Holy Scriptures not only guide doctrine but the life and morals of the Church" (*Bylaws II, D*). As a result, we assert the following truths:

- The Fifth Commandment against murder prohibits any deliberate harm of innocent human life, including abortion and euthanasia (cf. *Bylaws II, D, 1, a*).
- The Sixth Commandment against adultery affirms that marriage was created by God from the beginning as the life-long union of one man and one woman and for the procreation and nurture of children. Only within marriage are conjugal relations pleasing to God (cf. *Bylaws II, D, 1, b*). In recent years the so-called "Culture Wars" have seen attempts to re-define marriage and what it means to be human as male and female. Holy Scripture teaches that "God created man in His own image... male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27). Natural law concurs.
- "Altar and pulpit fellowship between church bodies is only possible where there is a common confession of faith based on the Word of God. Where there are disagreements between church bodies regarding the Word of God, we shall not pretend that these divisions are

unimportant or give a false witness of unity by practicing altar or pulpit fellowship” (cf. *Bylaws II, D, 2, a*).

- Concerning the Office of the Ministry, we believe that while “all Christians—men and women—are redeemed and able to serve the Church in many ways, Holy Scripture requires that only men who are spiritually qualified in life and doctrine are to be called and ordained as pastors to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments” (*Bylaws II, D, 2, b*).

These certainly are not the only teachings of Holy Scripture, but these are particularly misunderstood, challenged, and rejected in our day, and so must be all the more boldly confessed by those who hold fast the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions.

There is, indeed, an even greater and more blessed teaching of the Bible, which we cling to above all things. This 30th anniversary celebration is taking place at St. Mary’s City Church in Wittenberg where Martin Luther preached. Luther was not only a professor at the University of Wittenberg, he was also called as a preacher to St. Mary’s parish. His reform of the mass drew upon his brilliant linguistic, musical, and liturgical skill. However, it was motivated primarily by the biblical doctrine of justification by grace. Whether in the church or the classroom, Luther proclaimed Jesus and the Gospel of forgiveness of sins by God’s grace alone, through faith in the atoning life, death, and resurrection of Christ alone.

This is the chief doctrine of the Bible by which the Church stands or falls. In this teaching each Christian lives as he or she receives forgiveness in word, water, bread, and wine. It is fitting that the celebration of this 30th anniversary begins where this Chief Article of Justification was re-discovered, clearly preached, confessed, and sung with intrepid hearts. The ILC therefore supports its member churches in preaching the Gospel to the entire world and at the same time furthers “united diaconal action through intentional acts and programs of mercy in response to human need and suffering” (*Bylaws II.2*).

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

- 2 Timothy 4:1-2 -

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL BY ITS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland

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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

General Secretary: Rev. Dr. Timothy C.J. Quill
International Lutheran Council

APPENDIX 4: Resolution from the Convention of General Synod 2023 on Ordination

RESOLVED

That General Synod direct the LCANZ General Church Board and the College of Bishops to:

- a) Work through the theological, constitutional, and governance requirements to operate as one church with two different practices of ordination and establish a detailed framework through which this could be accomplished, such as one or more existing LCANZ Districts becoming Districts that teach and practice the ordination of both women and men to the office of the public ministry or by establishing a non-geographical LCANZ 'District' that does so, and
- b) Submit the fruit of this work in the form of a proposal that should be discussed by the LCANZ General Pastors Conference for Convention of General Synod 2024.
- c) It is the expectation of this General Convention of Synod that both women and men will be ordained in a District of the LCANZ during the 2024-2027 synodical period.